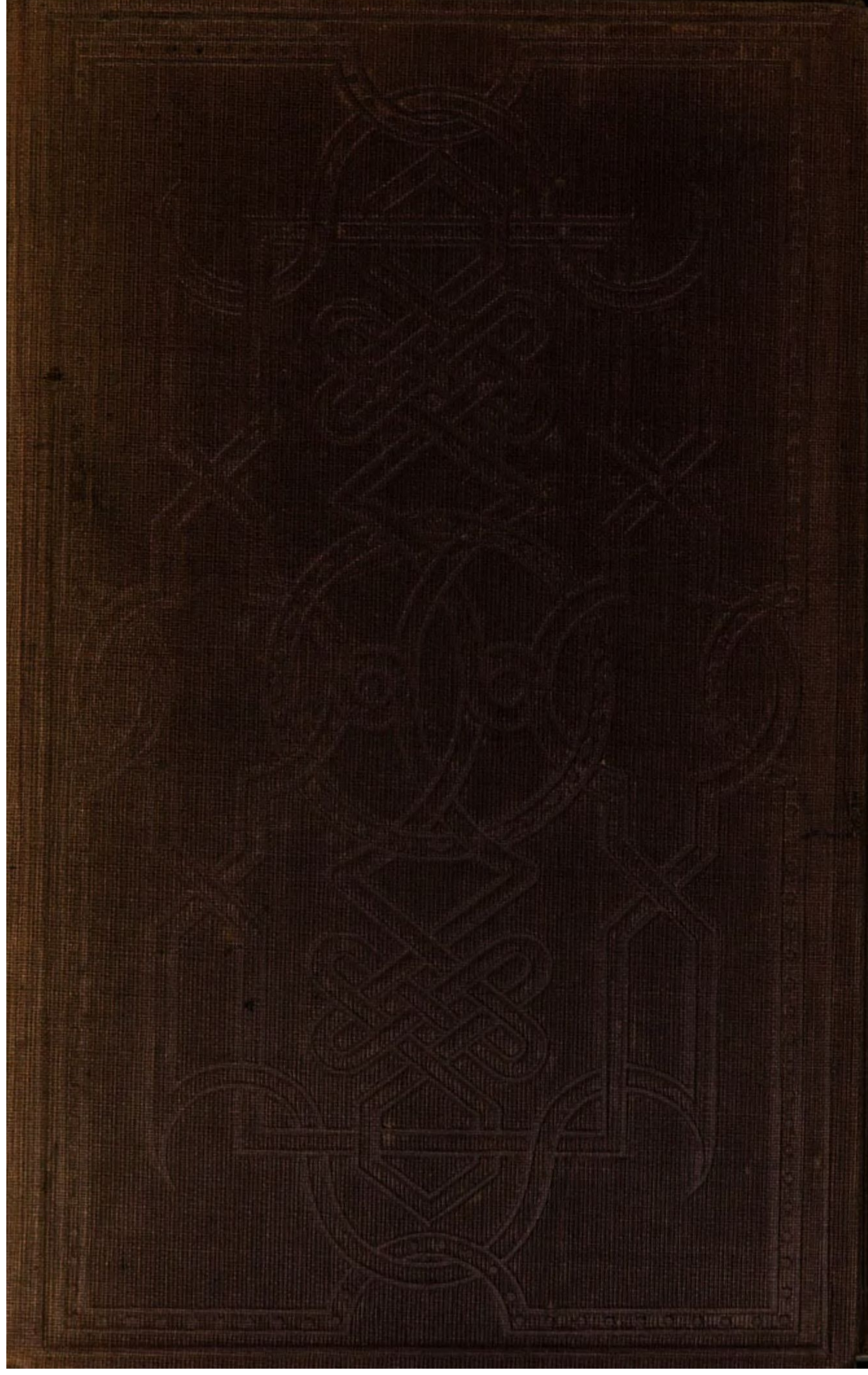




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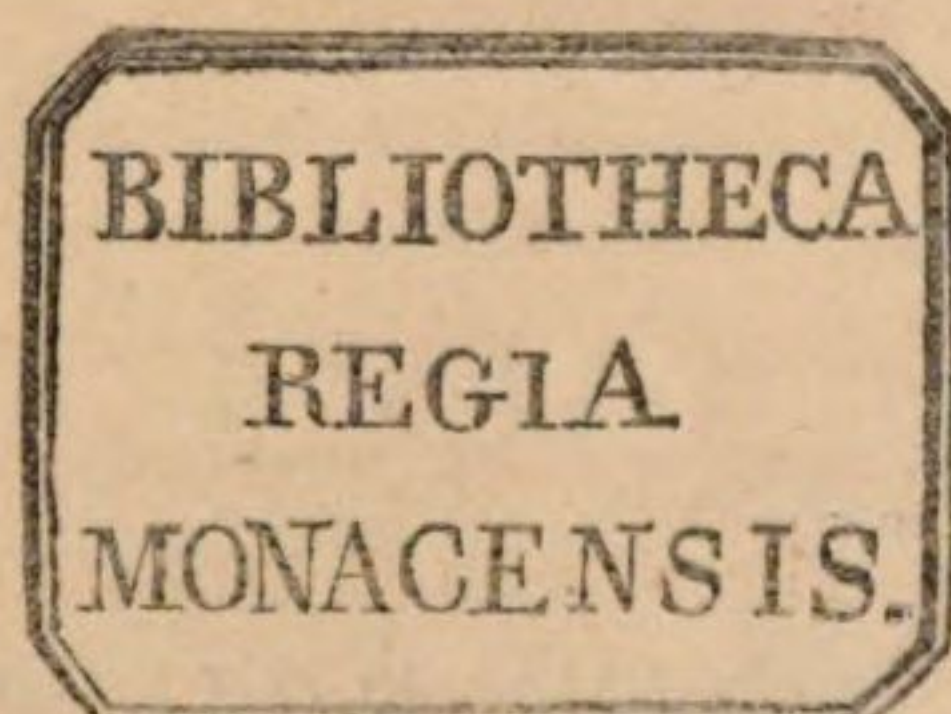
ON THE
RISE AND PROGRESS
OF
LITERATURE.

BY

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ON
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LITERATURE.

A CLOSE examination of animated Nature, in all its moral, mental, and physical attributes, will prove that man is distinguished from the inferior creatures of the earth by nothing so much as the possession of Literature and Science. Art, in the mechanical sense of the term, does not furnish so exact and conclusive a criterion between them; since it is in many instances approached, both in the manner of working, and in the effects produced, by the operations of Instinct; nay, sometimes we observe that the unerring felicity of Instinct defies competition by the elaborate contrivances of Art. But Science and Literature belong exclusively to man. In these he dreads no rivalry from the animals of more limited intelligence.

No less decisive will this test be found, when applied to mark the difference between rude and civilized humanity. From what cause that difference originally sprang, or how it was primarily manifested, it is not our present business to inquire. Enough, that reason and authentic history, surer guides than the freaks of ingenious speculation, concur to show

not only that the savage is the degenerate man, but, further, that some torpor of the intellect, or some perverse determination of the will, must have conspired with outward circumstances to retard or reverse, in certain regions, that process of improvement which has, in others, been so signally displayed. Hence it is in those pursuits which exercise the higher faculties and interest the nobler feelings, that the distinction between different portions of mankind becomes most evident. To supply the exigencies of their physical condition, provision is made by the least cultivated beings; in works of manual dexterity the mere savage is often exquisitely skilled; in magnificence of design, and beauty of execution, Art has frequently attained prodigious heights in communities that rank but low on the scale of that general refinement, of which science and literature are the only unambiguous signs. But where this standard of comparison is erected, the savage shrinks at once from trial; the various tribes of civilized men arrange themselves in regular degrees; and at the summit appear those nations, whose superior state of scientific and literary culture vindicates for them both a claim of dignity and a title to dominion, more valid than anything else could bestow. A single glance at the political aspect and position of mankind in the several quarters of the globe, is sufficient to corroborate the truth of this assertion. Europe, scarcely equal in extent to one-third of the African continent, and less than a fourth part of Asia or America, assumes the foremost place among them, and holds huge tracts of those enormous countries in absolute subjection. The great truth that knowledge is power has never received a more splendid illustration.

If we submit to a further scrutiny the proposed criterion of refinement, it will perhaps be found that of the two elements, of which it is made up, literature may be preferred to science, as an indication of general politeness. Not that great eminence in scientific pursuits can be achieved by a people without the existence of extraordinary intellectual abilities. But these abilities, and the occasions to employ them, may be restricted to a narrow class of individuals. The history of some ancient communities unquestionably demonstrates, both that science may flourish without literature, and that the powers and principles of science may be possessed by a brilliant few, while the mass of those around them are sunk in a deep gloom of comparative ignorance. Scientific principles may easily be turned into a mystery, and confined to a craft; and thus becoming the very badge of isolated castes, they may serve to enhance that barbarous pride, which men are so apt to derive even from sources capable of infusing more liberal sentiments. But it is the essential property and pride of literature to blot out every ungenerous distinction, and to raise the tone of thought and feeling throughout all classes of society. Its interest, its glory, lie in the diffusion of refinement. It breathes no other atmosphere; it can exist in no other medium. The results of science, the fruits of the most sublime discoveries, may be enjoyed by those whose intellectual faculties are, of themselves, inert or powerless: but the productions of literature have no currency, and its heroes no renown, if there be not in the general mind that degree of taste and elevation, without which the most beautiful displays of genius would be as music to the deaf, or painting to the blind.

The experience of recent times supplies additional evidence of the inferiority of science to literature as a criterion of mental culture. Schools have arisen of men, who, while they affect a profound devotion to scientific pursuits, hold literature in very slender estimation. With them science is every thing, literary elegance is nothing: the useful before the ornamental, or rather the useful without the ornamental, receives their exclusive homage. The sublime in poetry, the pathetic in eloquence, the gay, the graceful, or the grand in composition, they not only disdain in the abstract, but regard with contempt or abhorrence the ministers of such delights. They would at once trample on the pearls, and rend the hands that scatter them. It would not be difficult to show that these brutal doctrines repose upon a false basis, an entire misconception of that usefulness in support of which they are promulgated; but it is even more evident that the minds of those who entertain them, however energetic and successful in the prosecution of science, still remain unimprinted by the last stamp of genuine refinement.

Yet, odious and hurtful as the doctrine of utility becomes, when it assumes this shape, it may be traced in the outset to an extension of views arising not unnaturally from the inherent difference between literature and science. This difference lies not in their sources, but in the aims and principles which govern their direction. Both have their common source in the energies of the human intellect; both call into operation the inventive faculty as well as the judgment; in both, splendour of achievement results from force and intrepidity of genius. But their aims and tendencies must be regarded as essentially distinct.

Of science, the paramount object is truth ; of literature, the object is beauty. The business of science is to instruct ; of literature, the functions are not duly discharged unless delight accompany instruction. Science seeks to convince the understanding ; literature to captivate the heart. Even when the two are so conjoined, by a happy effort of genius, that scientific truths assume the attractions of a literary dress, it is still easy to recognize the separate elements, and assign to each its native province. Thus poetry sometimes sings of celestial phenomena ; but it requires no great fund of astronomical learning, to detect the results of scientific research and calculation beneath the glittering garb flung round them by the muse. Political economy puts on the disguise of fictitious narrative ; but a little attention suffices to remove the mask of the novelist, and reveal the features of the sage. The science of metaphysics owes far the greater part of its fame and popularity to the graces with which literary talent has adorned its speculations ; but the meagre army of truths, which these speculations are enabled to marshal, would command small reverence, were they banished from the realm of fancy, and forced to array themselves under no banner more gorgeous than their own.

The distinction here pointed out is one of considerable importance in itself, and which must be kept steadily in mind, as a clue to the whole course of the ensuing remarks. It may prove sufficient, if fully comprehended, to show, without resorting to the precarious aid of definition, what that literature is, of which the rise and progress are now to be described. Definitions of literature are commonly too wide and

vague to mark out the proper limits of such an inquiry. The definition, for example, suggested by an eloquent writer,* whose name stands high on the list of modern critics, embraces too large a field; and while it may serve to distinguish between literature and the exact sciences, does not trace the nicer boundaries that divide the art of composition from the subject-matter on which it is exerted, or those naked statements of the subject-matter, of which language, in its simplest usage, is capable. *All those mental exertions which have human life and man himself, for their object, and which, without requiring any corporeal matter on which to operate, display intellect as embodied in written language,*" belong not to the province of literature, in the light under which it is useful and pleasing to contemplate it, and under which, indeed, it was practically contemplated by the author whose words are here cited. Something higher we would understand by the name of literature; something higher must be understood, if its peculiar aims and properties have already been correctly developed. Poetry, not mere versification; history, not the bare record of facts; rhetoric, that charms even where it fails to persuade; philosophy, when clothed with grace or energy of style; these are the great branches of genuine literature, and to these alone will attention be invited as the proper topics of the following dissertation.

One part, however, of Schlegel's definition, commands our unqualified assent. *Intellect embodied in written language* is an essential characteristic of literature. Literature, as the very name denotes, is the

* Lectures on the History of Literature, ancient and modern, by FREDERICK SCHLEGEL.

creation of the alphabet. By this it is not meant to be implied that there was no fecundity of genius, and no progress in the art of composition, before the invention of letters. Analogy and positive argument combine to prove the contrary. Thus, amid the slight records of antediluvian society, nothing occurs to evince the existence of a written alphabet; yet, if we reason by analogy from the state of other arts, it will appear that, at that remote period, composition must have made some steps in advance of its earliest simplicity: the voice of poetry could not be mute where Jubal smote the lyre, nor would even the precision of a technical vocabulary be wanting where the artificers in brass and iron were taught by Tubalcain. Even in a far later day, some of the noblest productions of the human intellect were demonstrably anterior to the current use of letters; and, at this hour, genius throws out fitful flashes among uncultivated tribes, who have no visible signs to perpetuate the glories of eloquence or song. But without the introduction of such signs, it is obvious that the fruits of genius can put on no stable form: their existence must be precarious, their effects feeble and confined. Without letters, no people has attained a high degree of general politeness; and the mind of HOMER himself would have exerted no permanent influence upon literature, had his strains never assumed a more substantial shape than they bore while entrusted solely to the memory of rhapsodists.

The first rise of literature, even when thus viewed in its legitimate connection with the art of writing, carries us back into the bosom of a distant age. In some of its branches, the date of the incipient efforts of genius is fairly ascertained; the real antiquity of

other branches is doubtful and obscure. But among the curious and perplexing questions which the whole latitude of the subject would open up, it is necessary to exercise a spirit of forbearance, and to adhere pretty closely to a line of argument, of which clearness and continuity must be the distinguishing features. It would be an intricate, as well as a laborious task, to explore the faint original appearances of literature in every nation ; or, having everywhere discovered the source, to pursue the current of those streams, which becoming isolated in their progress, have constituted no parts of a general system. A direct continuous course must be looked for, if we would speculate with advantageous results. True it is that literature, like the empires of the ancient world, has had its periods of rise and fall, of prosperity and decay ; true is it, moreover, that the places of literary, as of political ascendancy, have varied from time to time ; nevertheless, throughout the whole history of literature, we can, by strict examination, discover a bond of union, and a principle of regular transmission. The illustrious heritage has passed into new hands, without ultimately losing a particle of splendour. Nations have soared or sunk upon the scale of comparative refinement ; but never has genius been beheld in a state of universal abeyance.

Yet, in another respect, hinted at above, the analogy between literature and empire may be pushed a little further. There are states and kingdoms whose interests are so much centered in themselves, so detached from foreign relations, that their history seems to have no points in contact with that of the rest of mankind. It forms no links in the great chain of political events. And there are bodies of

literature similarly circumstanced : replete, perhaps, with native graces, and interesting in their local history, but cut off from all connection with the course of general refinement, and bearing no relation to the development of mental power in the most civilized parts of the globe. It would be hard, for instance, to show in what manner the literature of China has acted upon that of other countries, or contributed to the general advancement of taste or knowledge. Nay, the same remark may be applied, in cases where its truth is not at first sight so apparent. The literature of India, ancient in its origin, affluent in its stores, and probably destined, from the attention newly excited in favour of every thing relating to the vast regions to which it belongs, to become more intimately blended with the details of European education, has hitherto been destitute of real influence upon the progress of polite learning. With a language, for which enthusiasts challenge the character of faultless excellence, and which, in fulness of expression, sweetness of tone, and regularity of structure, at least rivals the most perfect of those Western tongues, to which it bears a signal affinity ; with an antiquity retiring, on a very reasonable computation, to the distance of three thousand years ; with treasures of thought and imagery, on which the strains of Vyasa and Valmiki are enough to confer immortal renown ; covered as Indian literature is with these attractions, it has needed the aid of recent munificence* to introduce it, as a subject of study, even into the foremost seats of British education. And in an in-

* The late colonel Boden, of the East India Company's Service, has bequeathed his whole property to the University of Oxford for the foundation of a Sanscrit professorship, and the encouragement of Sanscrit learning. The first Professor was elected in 1832.

quiry, such as the present, according to the necessary rule already laid down, not all the beauties of which it may justly boast, nor the strong temptations to digress, which these hold out, will obtain for it a place. Other branches of Oriental literature, endowed with equal charms, cannot, in deference to the same rule, be considered in the order of precedence due to their respective dates. Thus, it is not until they are brought, through the medium of the Moorish empire in Spain, and of the crusades, into a near relation with the works of European fancy, that the tales and poetry of Arabia and Persia will be entitled to particular notice.

It is with a keen feeling of regret that, in searching for the true fountain-head of that literature, whose history is unbroken, and whose progress is part of our actual experience, we are constrained to pass by, for the present, a still more venerable portion of the intellectual treasures of the East. That any one who has studied the poetry, history, and philosophy of the HEBREWS, even merely as specimens of composition, should lightly esteem them, is impossible. In lyric flow and fire, in crushing force, in majesty that seems still to echo the awful sounds once heard beneath the thunder-clouds of Sinai, the poetry of the ancient Scriptures is the most superb that ever burned within the breast of man. The picturesque simplicity of their narrative gives an equal charm to the historical books. Vigour, beauty, sententiousness, variety, enrich and adorn the ethical parts of the collection. Nor is that seeming artlessness, which constitutes a principal charm of these writings, either naturally incompatible with the observance of certain rules, or actually uncontrolled by such as

denote an intimate acquaintance with the management of style. Moreover, it must be granted that these brilliant qualities of a literature, which at last excited the warmest interest among cultivated nations, have produced effects easily discernible in many works of modern genius. But that Literature whose sun has never set, from the first moment of its appearance above the horizon ; whose continuous current has rolled down from remote times to our own day ; was not derived from the confessedly more ancient literature of Israel. For ages the elder stream did not intermingle its waters with that of later birth indeed, but of more wide and permanent dominion. We shall hereafter, at the proper period, have to speak of their union : meanwhile, though the capital branches of grave composition had been enriched by the Hebrews, at least five centuries before the earliest memorials of GRECIAN genius, the latter must be allowed to occupy the foremost position in a sketch of general literature.

The Greeks, in a dream of national vanity, gave out their noblest stocks for the offspring of their own soil. They were ashamed to deduce their origin from any country, whose inhabitants they justly deemed inferior to themselves in the arts of war and peace. This fanciful hypothesis, however false as far as regards the people, becomes true when applied to one part of their intellectual history. Their literature was indeed autochthonal. The rise of mental refinement among them was independent of other races of men ; and its development was their own work. Their literary greatness, whose remains are a brighter trophy than the memory of their martial deeds or of their political systems, was the growth of the beau-

tiful region which it adorned ; and the same hands which reaped the field had sown it. It is not denied that they knew of the intellectual progress of nations anterior to themselves, nor that materials for thought to fashion, or imagination to embellish, were drawn by them, to a large extent, from foreign sources. But as it was with the language, so was it with the literature of the Greeks. Just as their language, after its principles were once fixed, and its vocabulary was established on a broad basis, while it admitted contributions from other lands, caused them to pass through an assimilating process of naturalization ; so, to the ideas that poured in from various quarters, their plastic minds gave a new consistent shape and an exalted value. Thus, among the elements of their mythology, originally discordant, though blended by genius into a wonderful semblance of uniformity, we perceive strong traces of the Oriental and Egyptian creeds ; but the parts taken from them have been cast in a fresh mould, and reproduced in more captivating lineaments. The monstrous is subdued into the vast ; the grotesque is formed into the graceful ; and a fine spirit of humanity is diffused over the rude proportions of the primeval figures. Such, likewise, has been the case with the Grecian mental philosophy. Many of its dogmas, some of its most remarkable forms, are evidently derived from Egypt or the East ; but all that tends to beautify the mean, to harmonize the incongruous, or to enliven the dull ; all that converts the simple precepts of morality, or the crude material of metaphysics, into an elegant department of literature ; belongs to the Greeks themselves. From the first dawn of intellectual culture among them they were creators of something new,

not mechanical echoers of the old. Upon the earliest manifestations of their genius there is no foreign stamp: their literature displays at once a proper, peculiar character. Its aspect is not Egyptian; for, though proficient in many branches of science; in medicine, astronomy, mechanics, chemistry, mathematics; Egypt had no literature. Nor is it Oriental; for, with the exception of those hints in religion and philosophy, to which we have already alluded, the East imparted none of her mental treasures to the ancient Greeks. Even the Phœnicians, the oriental people with whom Greece had the closest and most constant relations, were of no service in this respect. They, too, were devoid of literature beyond the mere rudiments of philosophic speculation; too deeply engrossed with their commercial adventures to yield more than a passing thought to less gainful pursuits. Yet it must not be forgotten that to them the Greeks were indebted for those means of perpetuating the fruits of intellectual exertion, of which they made such glorious use. Whatever uncertainty may hang about some parts of the legend of Cadmus, there can be no doubt that Greece received the inestimable gift of an ALPHABET from the shores of Phœnicia.

That the practice of writing, however, did not at once become common among the Grecian tribes, and that the materials of the art were scarce and costly, was perhaps as fortunate for their first efforts in composition, as it has been for posterity that the art was applied in time to snatch from the frail tenure of memory, and fix in an enduring shape, the finest monuments of their genius. The mere process of writing might have impaired that free, flowing, and

exuberant character, which probably belonged to their earliest productions, since it is so conspicuously manifested in the most ancient that still remain. Conjecture guided by analogy, our only light in examining those distant times, appears to indicate that from these remains we may correctly infer the nature of preceding attempts. The main-spring of intellectual exertion among the Greeks was the same that has acted upon all nations, who have not derived their literature from imitation; that joyous activity of mental power which breaks out wherever circumstances allow it to find scope, that desire to embody thought and feeling in a cognizable shape, and to impress upon the minds of others a copy of our own, of which original genius is universally conscious. Poetry, a primitive production in every region of the earth, springing out of principles that are inherent in the human soul, was a natural vehicle for emotions too powerful to be buried in silence; and one that presented itself the more readily while memory, which is so much assisted by the mechanism of versification, formed the chief means of perpetuating the results of mental labour. It was natural, too, that religious emotion, as one of the most vivid and universal feelings of man, should be early embodied in the poetry of a simple age. But those theories are fallacious, which assume that direct addresses to the gods, or lyric hymns, as parts of a public ritual, were the primary form of poetical composition among the Greeks. It must be remembered that of their poetry, previous to Homer, we have not even a fragment on which to reason. Many names, indeed, of more ancient poets are recorded, and works ascribed to some of the most famous of them are extant at

this day: but the spuriousness of these is too manifest to admit of controversy. From Homer alone, and from the portraiture of elder bards, which certain passages of the Homeric poems supply, we must learn the properties of the earliest Grecian minstrelsy. This evidence makes it plain that religious invocation was but an incidental portion of the minstrel's lay, and that the homage due to the deities was principally paid in a lively exhibition of their characters and adventures, a setting forth of mythological traditions, and a display of that faith which traced the interference of divine agency in every turn of human affairs. In short, it is not more certain that poetry was the first form of Grecian literature, than that the very rudiments of that poetry appeared in the guise of HEROIC song. For this there was found a rich profusion of appropriate and inspiring themes; and the chivalrous propensities of a people, whose legends abounded in such topics, ensured popularity for the strains in which they were recorded. Nor was there any lack of other circumstances favourable to the rise and growth of heroic poetry. The pride of chiefs, the spirit of clanship, the love of ancestral distinction, combined to elicit and reward the skill of those who could gratify passions so vehement. Hence not only Ionia, that seat of the Greeks where the most brilliant success in this species of composition was attained, but almost every part of the countries possessed by them, resounded with the voice of minstrels. Absurd as it is to imagine that the contributions of many separate bards could have been blended into poems of such marked unity and surpassing lustre as the Iliad and Odyssey, it is yet undoubtedly true that the bards were a numerous class.

The "*fames of the heroes*," such as Achilles chanted to the harp,* the Argonautic expedition, the siege of Thebes, the death of Meleager, above all the "tale of Troy," were the most prominent subjects of their lays. By the constant celebration of these favourite themes the powers of the Grecian mind were called out and cherished, the language was improved in copiousness and harmony, and the versification was moulded into an exquisite structure, which no subsequent endeavours were able to excel. Brighter, from time to time, shone the gleams of creative fancy; sweeter and more sweet arose the sounds that were heard in every quarter, until at last came that burst of amazing sweetness, strength, and majesty, which was destined to overpower all previous strains, and to fill the ears of posterity with its own music.

That great authors represent the times in which they flourish is an opinion commonly advanced and admitted. The proposition is true in relation to those who have taken their subjects from their own times, and so have been induced and enabled to draw from the life of a picture contemporary manners, feeling, and events. But it is more generally true to say that a great author represents *the mind* of his age; partly as by his influence on others he moulds their tastes and understandings to his personal bent, and still more as his genius empowers him to seize in its real essence the spirit of the time, to raise it to the highest pitch, to embody it in the most striking forms, and to bequeath for the instruction of future generations an unerring index to the intellectual condition of his own. Thus, in the poetry of HOMER,†

* Il. B. ix. v. 189. See the MUSEUM CRITICUM, v. i. p. 214.

† B. C. 900.

while we can perceive that he lived on the margin, as it were, of the heroic age, and that the state of things and manners around him was in some respects altered from that which he describes, we recognize withal a sincere though splendid image of the mental attainments, tastes, and tendencies of his Grecian contemporaries. What the Greeks knew, thought, felt, loved, admired, despised, hated, twenty-seven centuries ago, may be gathered from his strains as fully and freshly as if there had been no interval between them and ourselves. Whatever improvements, and doubtless they were many, he might make on the language of his countrymen; or on the compass and variety of that metre, to whose first principles the genius of the tongue itself must have led in the very dawn of their poetry; such as we find it in his poems we may infer to have been the prevailing style of composition in his day. Such in kind, however inferior in excellence, was the character of all that Greece could yet show of a literary nature, and had later efforts redeemed from oral recitation a mass of contemporary verse, the sole change required in alluding to it would have been one of epithet, from the *Hömeric* to the *Heroic* literature. Nevertheless, in the case of Homer, as in that of all transcendent genius, the powers and properties of an individual mind are deeply impressed upon his works. There is much in them which could not, we may be well assured, have emanated from any other mind. He had all that the minstrels of his age possessed: he had a great deal, to the measure and stature of which they never attained.

To analyse the qualities of Homer's genius would happily be a superfluous task. No student of general

literature is ignorant of these—of his sublimity and pathos, his tenderness and simplicity, his inexhaustible vigour, that seems to revel in the endless display of prodigious energies. The universality of his powers is their most astonishing attribute. He is not great in any one thing; he is greatest in all things. He imagines with equal ease the terrible, the beautiful, the mean, the loathsome; he paints them with equal force. In his descriptions of external nature, in his exhibitions of human character and passion, no matter what the subject, he exhausts its capabilities. His pictures are true to the minutest touch; his men and women are made of flesh and blood. They lose not a jot of their humanity for being cast in a heroic mould. He transfers himself into the bosoms of those whom he brings into action; masters the interior springs of their spiritual mechanism; and makes them move, look, speak, and do, exactly as they would in real circumstances. If Shakspeare appears to surpass him in this particular, it is only because the shades of character have been multiplied, and the expressions of passion varied, since the time of HOMER, by a widened range of circumstances, and an increased diversity of manners and conditions. But how ridiculous to suppose that such an attribute could be the joint property of several contemporary poets! When it has been proved that the characters of Lear and Othello were made up of patch-work, it may be believed that those of Helen and Achilles were eked out by the contributions of different minds.

Scarcely does it seem necessary to take further notice of that strange theory, which denies the individuality of the author of the Iliad, and asserts that,

in the age of Solon and Pisistratus, the poem was not merely reduced to writing, but was then for the first time compiled out of separate lays into an epic whole. As if a series of national songs could have been brought to cohere with so much smoothness; or would have evinced such unity of plot and purpose; or have been confined to so small a segment of the Trojan story; or have given such prominence to a single Thessalian hero; or have displayed throughout the characteristics of an identical and inimitable genius! Under all the shapes, with which French ignorance and German erudition, have clothed it, this hypothesis is equally untenable; and those who, while the genuine impulses of feeling and judgment prompt them to reject it, have not sufficient leisure or learning to examine the matter critically, may rest satisfied that there is no difficulty in the belief of a single author comparable to the difficulties of the opposite opinion. There may be difficulties upon the one side, but there are impossibilities upon the other. Intent, like all poets of the school of nature, not upon himself but his subject, Homer has told us nothing of his personal history. All biography that relates to him is of a fabulous character; but holding a steady course between credulity and scepticism, we may be assured of a few points of primary importance; to wit, that his name, whatever its etymology, has been rightly transmitted to us; that his principal residence was in the delicious climate of Ionia; and that though he belonged, as a poet, to a class, of which he is the glorious representative, yet that he excelled in a high degree all his brethren, and was as much the light of his own age, as he has been the wonder of those which have succeeded it.

A more rational question than that above alluded to, was raised even by some of the ancient critics, as to the other great poem ascribed to Homer. There are certainly some traces in the vocabulary, syntax, mythology, and manners of the *Odyssey*, which, compared with those of the *Iliad*, appear to indicate a later period and a different author. On the other hand, it is hard to believe that Greece produced two minds so kindred in strength and spirit; not only similar in kind, but equal in degree; and perhaps this last consideration should be suffered to outweigh all arguments, however plausible, in favour of a divided authorship. Moreover, the Return of Ulysses, while it was a natural theme for a bard who had sung the Wrath and Glory of the son of Peleus, necessarily led to scenes and subjects which may account for the larger portion of the discrepancies between the poems. At least the interval between them could not have been wide. They are compositions of the same class. In both there is the same general cast of thought, language, and versification; the same attachment to heroic life in all its adventurous varieties; the same views of the external world; the same mellifluous but masculine forms of speech; the same flexible harmony and rich cadences of metre.

The beauties of the Homeric poems were so striking in themselves, and so well calculated to rivet the national affections of the Greeks, that we can discover nothing surprising in the great and permanent influence which they exerted over all subsequent branches of Grecian literature. The marvel is that this influence should be least perceptible upon the immediate successor of Homer. The tone and temper of HESIOD'S* poetry are marked by a greater difference

* B. C. 800.

from his, than even many of the prose compositions which afterwards appeared. The juniority of this poet to Homer is proved not more by those verbal and metrical peculiarities, which speak so plainly to the ears of a critical scholar, than by something in the turn of thought and choice of subjects that evinces a further removal from the fountain-heads of natural feeling. We are forced to suppose the lapse of not less than a century, from the age of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to that of the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*. What a change from the deeds of soldiers to domestic arrangements and the cultivation of the soil! from "moving accidents by flood or field" to moral precepts and the details of celestial genealogy! It seems as if either the era of adventures were gone for ever, or the poet wished it to be so. He would call roving clans and fierce marauders to agriculture, to commerce, to all the beneficent arts of peace! We see that the didactic strains of the *Works and Days* were meant to unteach the spirit of the heroic times, and to heal the wounds which they had left behind them. Nor is it less evident that the *Theogony*, a poem whose authenticity has been rather unreasonably questioned, must have been posterior to the Homeric pictures of the gods. It was in regular sequence that after the bard should come the system-maker, with an attempt to reduce to order the desultory sallies of an imagination, which had given its own colouring to every thing that fell within its range. Perhaps, too, since Hesiod belonged, by residence at least, to a part of European Greece, his breast was imbued with the spirit of that Orphic poetry, of which we have no genuine remains, but which was certainly didactic in its tone, and de-

voted to the inculcation of ethics and theology. Now the Orphic poetry, together with the rites of the Bacchanalian worship, first introduced into Thrace, seem to have taken hold of the Grecian mind subsequently to the epoch of Homer. A contemplative cast of disposition, clearly discernible in his strains, will likewise serve to explain why Hesiod should have inclined to the mysteries of a symbolical religion rather than to the more popular and romantic representations of the Homeric muse. The genius of the elder and far greater poet asserted, however, in this, as in all other points, a decided ascendancy. We recognize it already in those Hymns in honour of the deities, commonly called Homeric, which came not, indeed, from Homer himself, but some of which are probably little later than the age of Hesiod, about eight centuries before the Christian era.

These HYMNS* form the connecting link between the epic poetry, which, after being carried to perfection by Homer, ceased for a long period to be successfully cultivated by the Greeks, and those Lyric effusions, under whose shape their inspiration was next bodied forth. The steps of the transition can be distinctly traced. Even the recitations of Heroic verse had been sustained by a simple musical accompaniment; but the music, to which the Hymns were sung, was apparently of a more prominent character, and thus led on to that decided influence of the lyre and pipe, which had so strong an effect upon the metre, style, and whole construction of the later poetry. Again, in the Epic narrative, the person of the minstrel was almost entirely concealed; but in the Hymns, as in the strains of Hesiod, it became

* B. C. 750.

more visible, and so prepared the minds of Grecian audiences for those explicit revelations of individual feeling, in which Lyric poetry, the poetry of emotion, largely indulges. Through all the Greek Lyric compositions, whether appearing in odes, in songs, or in the choruses of Tragedy and Comedy, this is the predominant tone. We find it in the enthusiasm and bitter fierceness of Archilochus;* in the thrilling, burning, heart-searching energies of love-tortured Sappho;† in the regal spirit and lofty pride that mixes itself up with all the fire of Pindar:‡ three illustrious names that mark the close of each successive century from the date of Hesiod, down to that of the Persian war, one of the most distinguished epochs in the literary history of Greece.

During this long interval of three hundred years, of which the remains are miserably scanty in comparison with its extent and importance, there occurred many events of vast moment to the progress of Grecian literature. It includes the age of Solon,§ and the reduction of the old heroic minstrelsy to writing, of which the practice had then become current, and the materials abundant. It includes the rise of prose composition in the works of the early historians, || whose chronicles, though but a few fragments of them survive, appear evidently to have set the example, and paved the way for the immortal muses of Herodotus. It embraces, also, the separation of the Greek tongue into dialects, a thing observable in every language, but rendered most conspicuous in this instance, by the rank and value of the several bodies of literature, thus distinguished

* B. C. 700.

† B. C. 600.

‡ B. C. 500.

§ B. C. 600.

|| Cadmus of Miletus, B. C. 600, Hecataeus, B. C. 500, &c.

from each other. It is true that, from the mode in which the ravages of time have operated, the relics of Ionic and Attic literature are by so much the most considerable, as to throw the rest into the shade; yet the *Æolic* and *Dorian* branches, to judge even from the fragments we possess, maintained an equal elevation, at least during the period now marked out, and until the culminating star of Athenian genius usurped the sky. While the heroic times, and those immediately succeeding them, still endured, and the forms of manners and policy among the Grecian tribes were nearly uniform, there was one general language of composition, somewhat modified by circumstances, chiefly of a local nature. Homer on the coasts of Asia Minor, Hesiod in Bœotia, and other poets in different quarters, employed the same form of their native tongue, diversified in none of its essential characteristics; and that form was undoubtedly the current speech of their countrymen, so far adapted to the exigencies of versification, and subjected to such occasional process of extension or elision, as was possible in the day of no grammars and glossaries, without risk of baulking the comprehension of their hearers. But with the various forms of life and government that followed the decline of the heroic age, there arose simultaneous variations in the language and complexion of Greek poetry, as well as in its concomitant music and dancing. In accordance with the simple but flowing rhythm of the Ionians, their compositions were commonly either of a soft, or of a buoyant and brilliant character; while the *Æolic* and *Dorian* harp resounded in unison with more deep and thrilling strains, as it was swept by the movements of more impetuous passion. And

thus, too, the gradations were fine and gentle by which the heroic verse and diction passed into the chief varieties of Ionian metre, and the peculiarities of the Ionian dialect, finally subsiding into the kindred Attic: but the changes made by the Doric and Æolian lyrist on the old metrical canon were abrupt and violent, and their dialects, retaining all the roughest collocations and inflections of the antique language, sought to revive or create a diction of the utmost strength and sternness. The opposite attributes of the two principal races are strikingly displayed in these differences; the Ionic elegance and airiness, contrasted with the lofty aspirations and the solemn and earnest disposition of the Dorian tribes.

Little later in its origin than the Lyric poetry of the Greeks, their Elegiac poetry flowed from the same source, though not by the same channel. Of the metre and language of this style of composition, moulded by an easy process out of the Homeric, Tyrtaeus* gave the first example. The stirring war-songs of this poet are conceived in the true spirit of Homer. They are even marked by a similar prominence of the subject over the person and individual feeling of the author; and thus differ widely from the martial lays of the troubadours, Bertrand de Born, Raimbaud de Vaqueiras, and other heroes of the Provençal literature, who have sometimes been compared with him. Allied in tone and temper to the Tyrtaean elegy were the patriotic strains of Callinus:† but the instinctive taste of the Greeks soon confined the elegiac distich to subjects for which it was better suited; themes of a plaintive, ethical,

* B. C. 690.

† B. C. 630.

or domestic character. With Mimnermus of Colophon,* the elegy assumed a tone of amatory softness, blended with gentle melancholy; and by Simonides† of Ceos it was established in its funereal functions. Yet in the monumental inscriptions of Simonides and his brethren, there still beat some pulses of the old heroic vein: it is in a different department of elegiac verse that we catch mingling traces of the Hesiodic poetry. In that poetry may be detected the rudiments of Greek philosophy, and the poetical dress was prepared, long after the time of Hesiod, for those speculations upon nature, morality, and politics, in which his spirit was partly revived by Solon and his sage contemporaries. From what we know of the seven wise men, that celebrated band which included the Athenian legislator, it is plain that they were the founders of the school of gnomic poets, for whose sententious maxims the elegiac couplet was so well calculated as to be at once adopted by them. How far the verses of this complexion still extant, under the names of Solon, Theognis,‡ and Phocylides, are authentic, is very questionable; but there can be no hesitation in admitting them as specimens of *the kind* of composition in which these writers exercised their poetic talents.

A single glance at the exquisite remains of Sappho and Simonides is enough to awaken the wish, keen in proportion to its hopelessness, that time and barbarism had spared a larger share of the Greek lyric and elegiac literature. Fortunate, however, it is, that in the former province we can still point to the strains of at least one immortal poet. The great

* B. C. 600.

† B. C. 550.

‡ Theognis, B. C. 550. Phocylides, B. C. 540.

name of PINDAR stands alone, like some solitary mass of ancient architecture, as if to reveal the beauty and majesty of the whole system to which it appertained. It is true that even of this poet the entire works have not survived: for Pindar, as we might learn from Horace, were there no other authority for the fact, displayed his powers in various styles of lyric poetry; in the wild dithyramb, the devout pæan, the gay and graceful glee; and still more pleasingly, perhaps, in odes of an elegiac character, in which he seems to have consoled the sorrows of the mourner by cheerful views of immortality and gorgeous visions of Elysium; while, amid the wreck of all these compositions, nothing has been left un-mutilated except forty-five triumphal lays in honour of victors in the public games. Yet it may be believed that time in this respect has not been cruel to the fame of Pindar. Considering the importance attached, in the eyes of Greece, to every thing connected with her great celebrations, the high rank of the chief Pindaric heroes, and the passion for power and splendour that was manifestly inherent in the poet's mind, it is almost certain that he bestowed his utmost efforts upon that class of his productions to which the extant odes belong. Pindar himself, whose notions of poetical dignity, respect for his own art, and confidence in his own genius, are eminently conspicuous, nowhere implies, even by a distant hint, that he would strike the lyre to other themes with livelier pride or more intense exertion.

The most careless reader of these odes must be struck by the excessive admiration of wealth, magnificence, and every species of greatness, to which we have alluded as a characteristic of Pindar's mind.

Splendour was the passion of his soul: splendour of achievement, splendour of renown, splendour of station and outward circumstances. His very pride seems to have suggested to him that nothing but splendour was worthy of his muse. His genius, to use a figure of his own, was the eagle of Jove, that would not be severed from the sceptre and the god. These aristocratic predilections, this enthusiastic attachment to munificent monarchs and chiefs of ancient fame, were in perfect unison with the whole tenor of his destiny; born, as he was, in the midst of the Pythian festival, living surrounded by shows of solemn pomp, and dying, as he had lived, in the full blaze of public ceremony, in the centre of a theatre, and while rapt in those emotions of rejoicing sympathy which such scenes were sure to awaken in his bosom. To those, however, who may deem apology requisite for the indulgence of so stately a temper, it may be urged in behalf of Pindar, that, as in the case of many remarkable poets, the abstract feeling of veneration was predominant in his mental constitution, and that it was called forth not merely by rank and opulence among mankind, but even more powerfully by the contemplation of the divine attributes. Hence that glow of piety which shines so brightly in his odes, sometimes breaking out in expressions of the deepest awe, or in sublime pictures of deity, and sometimes assuming an aspect of moral beauty, adding force and lustre to the lessons of wisdom. The latter modification of religious feeling has given birth to some of the noblest passages in the poetry of Pindar. He was well aware that emotion does not exclude sentiment; that the ethics of the heart are not less sound than those of the brain; and that

nature is often hurried, in moments of excitement, into the innermost shrines of truth. But he knew, likewise, that the philosophy of such moments is prompt and peremptory; oracular not syllogistic; and this knowledge has secured him from frequently offending against the genuine character of lyric song by lengthened strains of moral reflection. His example, indeed, strongly supports a doctrine primarily suggested by the study of the heart itself, that the lyric transport should not be abated by many thoughts of a meditative cast; and that the middle region, which certain critics have discovered; that mild and temperate clime in which they place the ethical and philosophic ode; is properly the province not of lyric but of didactic poetry. No opposition to this doctrine can fairly be grounded upon the strains of moral sentiment, so frequently found in the choral parts of ancient tragedy. For it may be argued that these are the offspring of peculiar circumstances, allowable, on a principle of contrast, as points of repose amid the passions of the drama; that they are, at whatever length delivered, still the dictates of a moral sense, brought into *sudden* energy by the excitement of the moment; and that, upon the whole, the greater portion of the choric odes rather abound in glowing portraiture of the objects of sense, in rapid narration, in brief allusions to heroic or divine achievements; in short, in all those brilliant qualities that adorn the verse of Pindar. A rapid movement, though perfectly consistent with the utmost grace in the transitions, is impressed upon the whole style of this genuine lyrist; distinguishing on the one hand his bursts of moral feeling from the formality of didactic poetry, and on the other his

sketches of incident or action from the copiousness of epic narrative. The latter distinction should be especially noted by those who would understand wherein consists both the resemblance and the difference of heroic and lyric song. Narrative is a prominent feature of both; but the narrative of the Epos abounds in full details, and dwells with lingering fondness upon the minutest particulars of an action; whereas the narrative of the ode is of a summary and impetuous character, bounding from part to part of a history with unflagging vigour, and touching only upon the most salient and striking points. This is the true source of nearly all the obscurity which modern readers, not so well versed as the ancients were in the ground-work of their own heroic legends and family traditions, have to complain of in the writings of Pindar; for nothing can be less like his style than the laboured incoherence and affected wildness of many of his imitators, whose faults, though belonging entirely to themselves, have been unjustly visited upon the name of their master.

The diction of Pindar, being founded upon a Homeric basis, and sparingly mixed up with Doric and Æolic peculiarities, has no philological value as a specimen of dialect. But his works have a double value as pertaining to the Doric school, and thus affording something, out of a mass of lost poetry and philosophy, to set off against the vast preponderance of Ionian and Attic literature. His lofty temper, and undisguised antipathy to the democratic principle, are strongly expressive of that school, and in complete harmony with the oligarchical constitution of the Dorian states. To the same cause, heightened by the political position of the Thebans throughout

the struggle between Greece and her Persian invaders, must be imputed the coldness of his homage to liberty, the lack of frequency and fervour in his allusions to the efforts of contemporary patriotism. And hence it is, that, though the date of Pindar corresponds with that of the Persian war, we must look to other writers for proofs of the animating influence which that event exerted upon the feelings, the intellects, and the literature of the Greeks.

ÆSCHYLUS,* born seven years earlier than Pindar, appears, by a strange coincidence, to have made his first public exhibition a few months before the Theban lyrist, produced the first of his extant odes, of which the date can be ascertained. The name of this great poet marks an era of twofold interest and importance; the rise of the Athenian dialect and literature, and the commencement of the regular drama. A tendency towards this most prominent and palpable species of imitative composition is so strikingly displayed in every development of Grecian intellect, that we are not surprised to find Aristotle identifying imitation with the very essence of poetry. Nowhere is it shown more evidently than in the most ancient works. Plato does not hesitate to call Homer, in express terms, the father of Tragedy. But, however strongly the imitative principle might manifest itself in heroic song, or in other kinds of composition, it was hardly possible, in rude and boisterous times, for the stately fabric of the theatre to arise. Progressive approximations to this conclusion were made, however, in various parts of Greece, as the habitations of men became more settled, and greater attention was bestowed upon the culture of peaceful arts

* B. C. 500.

and enjoyments. Mimetic performances were gradually blended with Bacchanalian hymns and other rites of a serious or mirthful character. On the soil of Attica the first decided step to dramatic exhibitions was taken by Thespis;* many improvements were made by his successor and scholar Phrynicus;† and at last, under the impulse given by the genius of Æschylus, the migratory waggon and temporary scaffold were exchanged for a stage; dialogue was introduced, and by degrees established in due pre-eminence over the lyric effusions of the chorus; theatrical dress and decoration became sumptuous and effective; and Tragedy assumed, in shape and in substance, its noblest attributes. Hitherto the art had been in embryo, a mere larva struggling into form; now it started up as the finished specimen, perfect in all its members, although hues of beauty and powers of flight were afterwards added or increased.

Æschylus is a glorious example of the Athenian character in its highest perfection; genius, patriotism, and valour. The virtues of the soldier-citizen, called forth by the shock of foreign arms, and inflamed by the remembrance of hard-earned triumphs, have given peculiar force to the poetry of one, who had personally shared the dangers of the conflict. It is everywhere the language of a hero, and seems to resound with the noise of battle. At the same time, the innate propensities of the mind of Æschylus, as well as the emotions naturally excited by the Persian invasion, and by the great part which Athens had sustained in the contest, are to be traced in the daring flights and lofty conceptions of his muse. There was something gigantic in his mental character, that

* B. C. 535.

† B. C. 511.

found congenial elements in the antique mythology and legends of Greece; in the Titans who combated with Jove, the founders of extinct dynasties, and those deeds and crimes of the olden time, which were magnified by the mist of intervening ages into features of transcendent greatness or atrocity. That ideal standard, which all poetry erects for itself, since all poetry has more or less of an ideal tincture in its composition, was clothed, in his imagination, with an aspect of supernatural strength, wisdom, or power. Hence it is, that beings and faculties of more than mortal mould are so often conjured within the circle of this potent enchanter. Hence, too, the extravagance and eccentricity of thought and diction, which have always been pointed out as the chief faults of *Æschylus*. His metaphors, like the masks of his invention, are exaggerated images; his genius, like his actors, bellows through a trumpet. Yet, though fonder of commanding our wonder than our sympathy, he was not without an intimate knowledge of the human heart, and sometimes penetrates the soul of his readers by touches of exquisite feeling. Occasionally, likewise, there is a simplicity of language, continued through long passages, that is the more astonishing in his plays, when we recollect how close they lie to the confines of lyric song, and what a perpetual struggle *Æschylus* must have maintained against the inflation of ideas and expression, which is incidental to that species of poetry. But simplicity, as a general characteristic, is to be sought, not in the style but in the plan of his tragedies. The primitive artlessness, and direct movement of his plots cannot be exceeded. In comparing them with the dramatic productions of later times, it is necessary to keep con-

stantly in remembrance that the ancient and modern drama are constructed upon different principles. In the ancient drama the plot arises out of the expansion of a single incident : no wonder that it is simple ! In the modern drama the plot arises out of the compression of a whole narrative : no wonder than it is intricate !

Even upon the plays of SOPHOCLES,* who is universally acknowledged to have carried Greek tragedy to the highest pitch of perfection, this original principle of structure had a prodigious effect. But he was more of an artist than Æschylus : he was more happy in the selection and arrangement of his fables ; and abounds more in the well-wrought interest and striking reverses, which Aristotle instructs us to esteem as the triumphs of dramatic skill. That these are compatible with a rigid unity of action is sufficiently proved by the manner in which Sophocles has treated the legend of Œdipus, in the best of all his productions ; while the failure of Corneille and of Voltaire, in their several attempts to extend the combinations and improve the conduct of the plot, is perhaps the most decisive tribute to the ability of the Greek poet in the management of that difficult subject. His general desire to heighten the interest of his fables is shown by the addition he made to the number of actors, who might be simultaneously brought upon the stage ; an improvement certainly copied by Æschylus in the latter part of his career. But, besides this technical addition to the facilities of the dramatic art, Sophocles was in other respects an improver on the Æschylean model. The ideal region, in which his imagination loved to expatiate,

* B. C. 495—405.

was different from that of the elder bard; peopled not with supernatural terrors and shapes of colossal magnitude, but with images of perfect majesty, serenity, and beauty. The impress of such lofty and noble contemplations is seen in the almost faultless excellence of his style. It is not wild, unequal, and irregularly grand; but stately, sober, and elaborate. The few sallies which he makes in the manner of Æschylus, fail, as imitations often do, by putting on the external shape without the vivifying spirit of the original. But in these passages the poetry of Sophocles is wandering from its native channel, along which it usually flows, a mild majestic stream, seldom ruffled by the tempest, seldom breaking in upon its limits, but bearing on its aspect the unquestionable symbols of dignity and power.

With the third of the great tragic writers of Athens the decline of the art at once commenced and was consummated. Active and fertile as the genius of EURIPIDES* was, it would perhaps have been vain for him to contend with either of his predecessors on ground already occupied by them; with Æschylus in force and grandeur, or with Sophocles in purity of style, in symmetry of plot, and in the beauty and impressiveness of moral lessons. But Euripides made no such effort. He struck into a new path more in consonance with the depraved taste and degenerate manners of the generation by which he was surrounded. To say that the ideal was totally banished from his works would be false; but the ideal world of his fancy was not one of sublime elevation nor of stately repose; it was full of sickly sentiment and disorderly passion. The standard *above* humanity

* B. C. 479—404.

was discarded ; but a standard *beyond* humanity was substituted in its room. In seeking to keep up a tempest of perpetual agitation, to harrow the weaker feelings of our nature, Euripides showed men as they never show themselves ; he enhanced voluptuousness and aggravated error. In character, language, costume, and attitude, that Homeric tone of masculine greatness, which had hitherto ennobled the stage, disappeared. With this departed likewise the solemn march and simple evolution of the tragic fable. Their place was supplied by plots perplexed without interest, and fantastic without ingenuity. Nor were these the only faults of the new school. The choric odes, though adorned with poetical graces, were but loosely connected with the business of the scene : the dialogue was disfigured by the quirks of sophistry, and the pomp of rhetorical declamation ; qualities which probably contributed to make Euripides so marked an idol of Parisian taste. Hence, notwithstanding the many merits of this writer as a poet ; his pathos, his tenderness, his love of nature, his insight into the heart of man ; to him must mainly be imputed the ruin of the tragic drama among the Greeks. His very beauties made him a fatal example. He thought too much of himself, and too little of his subject ; the play was bad when the poetry was exquisite ; his aim was occasional effect, rather than steady and consistent excellence. If his perceptions were keen, his discrimination was not equally acute ; he mistook the coarse, or the ludicrous, for the simple ; and if he sometimes made little things great, he more frequently made great things little. In the pathetic, his most successful branch of writing, he is often a plagiarist on his own conceptions ; in ethics he is rarely free

from subtlety or petulance ; and in philosophy, content to be always a disciple, and devoid of original power, he has repeatedly been made the organ of doctrines, whose folly or mischief he did not understand.

Longinus, who has drawn from the sun a simile to illustrate the differences between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, might have discovered a like illustration of the rise and fall of Grecian tragedy. With *Æschylus*, it is the dawn of a glorious day, rich in gorgeous colouring and bright promise, but still battling against the clouds, and thwarted by the morning haze ; with *Sophocles*, of a mature and steadfast radiance, it glows in the meridian ; and with *Euripides*, its aptest emblem is the setting luminary, beautiful even in decline, and flooding the skies with a softened lustre, but shorn of power and splendour, and soon to be swallowed up in the darkness of night. Into those shades of obscurity it is not necessary to follow the expiring art. Even while the works of their contemporaries or successors still survived, the ancients themselves acknowledged the pre-eminence of the three great poets whose characteristics have been pointed out. It would neither instruct nor amuse the reader to lead him through a dry catalogue of more than a hundred names, here and there associated with a single piece, or a few fragments, which extend beyond the classical era as low as the fourth century after Christ. All the lustre of Greek tragedy vanished with *Euripides*, and in the latest productions that assumed the title, its very form disappeared.

If it is expedient, when considering the ancient tragedy, to dismiss modern notions of plan and ex-

cellence; it is yet more proper to do so when engaged with the subject of the Greek comic drama. The form of that species of poetry, especially in its more early and interesting shape, was very different from the comedy of intrigue which has gained possession of most modern stages. Like tragedy, it arose out of the ebullitions of Bacchanalian festivity. It is probable that Susarion* of Megara first improved the Phallic hymn, a principal portion of the Bacchic ritual, into a farce performed by a chorus, and accompanied by extemporaneous effusions of raillery and sarcasm. But the Syracusan Epicharmus,† the contemporary of Æschylus, did for Grecian comedy that which Æschylus effected in the other department of the drama. He changed the loose interlocations of the Megarian comedy into regular dialogue; gave to each exhibition an unbroken fable; and softened into ridicule the coarseness of personal invective. His plots were chiefly of a mythological cast, and the elegance of his style was the more remarkable, when contrasted with the rough buffoonery to which it succeeded. Mitigated, however, as the scurrility of his predecessors was in the plays of Epicharmus, accurate criticism will detect, in what tradition has recorded of them, some distinct elements of the Aristophanic comedy. The habit of burlesquing the tragic style and subjects, to which jealousy of their rising fame probably inclined him, was revived in the incessant parodies, in which the Athenian comic writers indulged their humour or their spleen; those political strokes that seasoned the wit of Epicharmus were a type, though a faint one, of the perpetual battery which the poet of Athens was ex-

B. C. 560.

† B. C. 500.

pected to play upon public affairs and public men; and the invented characters, the fanciful stories, the mixture of seriousness with jocularities, which marked the Sicilian style, are all features to be recognized anew in such productions as the *Wasps*, the *Birds*, and the *Clouds* of Aristophanes.

The chief alteration made by this great writer and his Athenian predecessors on the Syracusan model, was the bringing back, with a loftier aim, but equal or augmented bitterness, the personal satire of the primitive Phallic songs. They thus stamped upon the Old Comedy a deep indelible impression. It was essentially satirical, and sank at once when its essence was withdrawn. Not that its authors were so simple as to baulk their countrymen of that variety, which in the theatre, as everywhere else, was dear to the inhabitants of Attica. Many other ingredients were blended with the predominant one of personal invective. On the slender thread of an artificial plot were strung together sarcasm, ridicule, poetry, wit, humour, politics, parody, and puns. The old Comedy may want symmetry and order; it may be deficient as a work of art; yet as a rich and ready vehicle for the flights of genius, it was congenial to the taste of Athens, and worthy of the illustrious poet, from whose remains we now learn to understand its nature.

ARISTOPHANES* had so high an idea of his function as a dramatist, and of his own mental powers, that, had regularity of plot, or an ingenious combination of incidents, been required in the structure of the old comedy, he would certainly have attempted it, and if we may judge even from some scenes of his

* B. C. 456.—386.

existing plays, with eminent success. But in reviewing his productions as a whole, and as specimens of the system to which they belonged, not only the ancient conception of the comic art, but likewise the character of the Bacchanalian festival must be taken into the account. To the more solemn and exalted species of mental inspiration, tragedy was consecrated; but of that airy and extravagant spirit, that intoxication of the soul, of which Bacchus was equally the patron, the Attic comedy, in its first estate, was at once the triumph and the type. Hence every appearance of forethought and laborious preparation was avoided, and the reins were freely given to the utmost license of fable, sentiment, and expression, which an exuberant fancy could supply. On this principle we easily find a reason for the wildest sallies of buffconery, and a reason too, if not an excuse, for that grossness of language and allusion, which harmonized with the obscene ensign of the original Phallic ceremonies. But, above all, this principle explains to us the general meagreness or irregularity of the Aristophanic plots. It was impossible often to contend against the humours of the feast. While "laughter holding both his sides" was lord of the ascendant, the poet was ashamed to show himself in earnest. To take anything in earnest was alike foreign to the disposition of his audience. Thus they tolerated the most vehement attacks upon their own faults and follies in a collective capacity; and permitted the comic author to treat their deities, and the religion of the state, with a degree of irreverence, the slightest approach to which, in a writer of tragedy, was visited with severe animadversion. Aristophanes was not behind

his brethren in availing himself of some of these professional immunities; yet, wherever, amid the coarseness, the grotesqueness, and the mockery of the old comic vein, the personal character of the man breaks out, we see that it was not merely his boast, but his real wish and aim, to elevate the tone of his art. The graces of his diction no one will seek to gainsay. He wields the idiomatic powers of the Attic form of speech with a skill unrivalled, except, perhaps, in the dialogues of his admirer Plato. Nor should it be forgotten, that he is at least as much a poet, as a satirist, or a buffoon. Snatches of exquisite poetry are perpetually intermingled with the passages of a more robust or vulgar quality, like glimpses of an Elysian distance descried from some rugged or revolting foreground. When we add to this, that the patriotism of Aristophanes was of that sterling ore which shines from its own brightness, without the adventitious gilding of popular professions, we claim for him the crowning merit of a great mind. The last mentioned excellence necessarily involves another that may justly be ascribed to him; a sound consistent view of the philosophy of morals. Even his memorable assault upon Socrates, however erroneous in the choice of an object, or unwarranted in the extent to which it was carried, must be imputed to no other motive. It was wrong to confound Socrates with the sophists of his day; but it was right that the practices and doctrines of the sophists should be exposed and reprobated with exemplary rigour. Yet the precipitance with which the poet identified a wise and virtuous humourist with the intellectual empirics around him, has caused his satire, in this instance alone, to recoil upon himself. In all other

instances the attacks of Aristophanes were as just as they were tremendous; a fact greatly to the honour of one whose shafts flew so thick on every side, that he might well have exclaimed, with a celebrated writer of modern times, "What public question have I declined? what villain have I spared?"

Such severe, though wholesome discipline, as that which was exercised by the authors of the old comedy, could coexist with nothing but a state of absolute liberty. When the free spirit of Athens was extinguished, the license of the comic theatre, after languishing through various stages of decline, finally expired. The gradations of the middle comedy, to which some even of the later plays of Aristophanes perhaps belonged, are ill defined; but simultaneously with the overthrow of Athenian independence,* appeared the first distinct specimen of a new species of dramatic poetry, in which the pungent sarcasm, the political heat, and the rampant humour of the Aristophanic music were exchanged for graceful lessons of morality, accurate delineation of character, and the interest of regular plots. This new kind of comedy was brought to perfection by MENANDER,† the loss of whose works is imbibbered to us by the loud applauses of the ancient critics, and only *half-compensated*, if we believe Julius Cæsar, by the imitations of Terence. Through all the changes and additions, however, of the Latin imitator, we can perceive the nature of the fables adopted by the new comedy, and that it was, as either Greek modes of life or the rigidity of the dramatic canons forced it to be, rather the comedy of manners than of intrigue.

* B. C. 335.

† B. C. 312—292.

The chief charm of Menander seems to have lain in his delicate portraitures of character; in the consummate propriety of his style, still visible in the remaining fragments of his plays; and in a profusion of that Attic salt, which, to use an elegant expression of Plutarch's, appeared to have been taken from the very wave out of which the goddess of love and beauty rose.

Thus the poetical glory of Athens, spread over a space of two centuries, and sustained by different forms of the tragic and comic drama, vanishes at last in a few fragments and a name. After Menander there is nothing worthy of commemoration. But during the same period, the other great branch of literature had been cultivated by some of the most powerful minds that adorn the Grecian annals, and that have raised prose composition, in its chief varieties, to a level with the noblest achievements of poetry.

To the earliest Greek chronicles, which prepared the way for regular history, we have already had occasion to allude. Succeeding, as records of past transactions, to the songs of the mythic age, they had about them much of the spirit of poetry, which still lingers in the epic plan, the picturesque descriptions, and the untiring flow and fulness of HERODOTUS.* These, together with the highest degree of clearness, simplicity, and natural pathos, are the qualities that render the style of this author so perfect a model of historical composition in the eyes of all who are not blinded by false taste, or by attachment to a particular theory. Something, perhaps,

* B. C. 484—407.

of the inexpressible pleasure, with which we dwell upon his pages, is due to the musical forms and idiomatic graces of the Ionic dialect; employed by him though he was himself a Dorian, either in deference to the preceding annalists, whose desultory sketches he improved into an art, or from a deliberate choice, grounded upon its exquisite fitness for the purpose of narration. Even if, in respect of dialect, he was indebted to the example of his predecessors, he left them far behind him both in excellence of method, and in extent and dignity of subject. His was one of those fertile minds whose energies were summoned forth by the prodigious crisis of the Persian war; an event which, though ushered in by a copious introduction, and surrounded by beautiful episodes, yet constitutes the main plot and business of his history. Herodotus has been called the Homer of historical composition; and he deserves to be so named not only from a certain affinity with the style and language of the great poet, but from the unity of his design, and its subservience to the renown of his country. Like Homer, too, though well versed in the knowledge of human nature and the foundations of ethical science, he makes no parade of his own sagacity. He suffers persons and events, delineated with graphic minuteness, to speak for themselves. In this, as in other particulars, he displays a true conception of the historian's office. History is never so enchanting, never so useful, as when it keeps to its native domain.

Every one will wish to believe, though the tradition rests on no very ancient authority, that the public recital by Herodotus of that great work, in its first condition, which for fifty years he continued to en-

large and improve, drew tears of youthful emulation from the eyes of THUCYDIDES.* Yet, if the spirit of rivalry were thus roused within him, he at least took care to strike out a new path, as remote as possible from the track already opened up. In many things his manner of viewing and of treating history was perfectly original. Together with the Attic dialect, which had been only recently adapted to prose composition, but which was suited, by its compact strength and manly tone, to the grave tenor of his subject, he introduced other deviations from the Ionian standard. While in Herodotus we find the simple majesty, the flexibility, the stately evolution and warm colouring of the heroic epos, Thucydides has all the concentrated interest, the depth, and the gloom of tragedy. Greece, no longer buoyant on the tides of patriotism and national triumph, but torn by intestine animosities, the sport of profligate counsels, and about to sink into the gulf of ruin; a great people, in their corruption and decline; and the fall of that Athens, which, in spite of its vices and follies, had been the boast of the best days of freedom; such was the melancholy theme with which he chose to moralize his pages. It was a sombre, but a pregnant subject; full of striking lessons; rich in materials for eloquent description; and worthy of the highest elaboration which art could bestow. Of these capabilities it would be vain to deny that the historian has made admirable use. But in no instance are the defects, that often accompany genius of the first rank, more conspicuous. With all his dramatic power, and vivid representation of separate scenes, Thucy-

* B. C. 471—403.

dides is not happy in the general arrangement of his topics. His style is darkened by a studied obscurity, that too frequently converts eloquence into the appearance of conceit. Above all, the spirit of philosophizing has infected too large a portion of his work. In the harangues, which he puts into the mouths of his personages, and the reflections which he makes upon events, we often detect a metaphysical subtlety, diving too deep for the truth. The example, thus set, has been eminently unfortunate: it has operated more or less upon all subsequent historians, opening a wide door for partiality and prejudice, and changing, in many cases, the art of animated and impressive narrative into that of mere speculation.

In purity of style, and in lightness and clearness of description, Thucydides is surpassed by ZENOPHON.* One is tempted, therefore, to ask why, in general estimation, Zenophon should be ranked below Thucydides, as well as below the historian of Hali-carnassus? It seems that for this inferiority his subjects must be chiefly accountable. They are deficient either in unity and grandeur, or in compass and importance. The conclusion and results of the Peloponnesian war, detailed in his *Hellenic Annals*, present not so fine a field as the causes and course of that great moral and political revolution which Thucydides traced out in its operation upon all parts of Greece: and the brilliant adventures, portrayed in the *Anabasis*, though they blend the dignity of truth with the interest of fiction, and may even be connected, by some visible relations, with subsequent events of the highest moment, have of themselves the

* B. C. 443—353.

air of a mere episode in history. But, in addition to this, it cannot be disguised that the masculine energy and weight of Thucydides, as a political reasoner, by no means revive in the parallel passages of Xenophon. Notwithstanding his grace, his perspicuity, and his tenderness, the intellectual achievements of the latter furnish a proof that he who passes, in too ambitious a career, from province to province of literature, must not hope to erect in any the trophies of supreme dominion.

For it is in many different capacities that Xenophon must be viewed, in order to comprehend his whole character; and in all he has associated his name with the art of composition. Not to mention his writings as a statist, an economist, and a sportsman, the works next in value to his historical productions are those in which he skims the surface of the Socratic philosophy, and draws a picture of its founder. Thus he forms, in his own person, a link between the literature of Greek history, and the literature of Greek philosophy: a subject far better treated by him where he makes Socrates directly his hero, than where, in the province of historical romance, to which the *Cyropædia* belongs, he mixes up Grecian tenets as well as Grecian manners with elements of a heterogeneous description.

With the peculiar systems of the various schools, into which the philosophers of Greece were divided, we have here no concern. This sketch can embrace only the prominent characteristics of the few great men, whose genius has given to the speculations of science a place in the most beautiful of all bodies of literature. It has been previously remarked that the first regular seeds of Grecian philosophy lie

scattered amid the poetry of Hesiod: and that the poetical medium long continued to be that through which its maxims were conveyed. But many of the most celebrated among the elder sages declined the honours of authorship; a fact, perhaps, not much to be regretted, at least if we are to suppose that their style would not have excelled their doctrines. Look to whatever side we please, if we except a few gleams of truth, and a few gnomic precepts of moral or political sagacity, there is little in what we know of the ancient schools, Ionian, Pythagorean, or Eleatic, to impress us with a high degree of veneration. Everywhere we see them lost in physical theories, that run into materialism, or in visionary metaphysics, that cannot be said "to call for aid on sense." To the instability of their principles, the uncertainty of their deductions, and a sort of mental refinement, perfectly compatible with gross corruption of manners, which grew out of their speculative exercises, and gradually cast its sickly hues over the manly lineaments of the old Greek character, must be traced the rise of the Sophists, that dangerous tribe, who flocked from many quarters to Athens, about the period of the Peloponnesian war, and whose history powerfully demonstrates, that errors of opinion must end at last in practical mischief. A show of universal knowledge, a dexterous perversion of the dialectical art, and a jingle of antitheses, that sounded like oratory to indiscriminating ears, were the chief weapons of this pestilential race, who were unhappily allowed to poison the sacred sources of education, and whose influence on the acute but fickle minds of the Athenian youth threatened the utter subversion of truth. But the excess of the

evil wrought its own cure. The activity, the success, and the ostentation of the Sophists, stung into vigorous antagonism an intellect as subtle as their own, capable of wielding the same arms, but with a more potent energy, and a better aim. SOCRATES* entered the controversial arena, whereon he was destined to sustain so conspicuous a part, and to work so complete and glorious a revolution in the Greek philosophy.

While Socrates purified the spirit and corrected the tendency of philosophical researches; while he even laid, by the hands of his disciples, the foundations of systematic speculation; he himself wrote nothing. Yet his colloquial lessons, preserved by that affectionate enthusiasm, which his virtues kindled, and his very eccentricities helped to keep alive, gave birth to the branch of literature that numbers among its foremost names those of Xenophon and Plato. In the pages of Xenophon we find a lively sketch of the Socratic ethics, and noble views of natural religion, which have almost exhausted that province of argument; but there is a want of depth and of completeness on the more abstruse points of metaphysics, which is somewhat unsatisfactory when compared with the vastness and profundity that distinguish the writings of PLATO.† That illustrious man was more earnest and exclusive than his elegant contemporary in his devotion to philosophy. Except in a few trivial attempts to bestow the poetical dress on thoughts that ever teemed with the fine essence of poetry; attempts, from which his own sagacity, or the advice of his great master, speedily diverted

* B. C. 468—398.

† B. C. 429—347.

him; he did not waste his fire on other pursuits. Without being a methodical writer, he had an intellect too discerning and too accurate to leave mental science as vague and undefined as he found it. He shadowed out its chief divisions, and their mutual dependencies; and was a benefactor to philosophy even with regard to *form*. But much more did he benefit philosophy by the light and glory which his genius flung around every topic it embraced, and by the unrivalled fascinations of a style that drained all the treasures of the Grecian tongue. We forgive the infidelity with which he often distorted or exaggerated the views of Socrates; the mysticism into which he is prone to dream himself away; the folly of some of his political reveries; the perverseness of some of his ethical doctrines; all is forgiven, as we smile or sigh beneath the spells of this mighty wizard. The shape into which he has thrown his productions; that shape of dialogue which, as managed by him, appears so easy and delightful, that it requires the repeated failures of other writers to demonstrate its intrinsic difficulty; afforded room for every grace of composition, from the smartness of dramatic retort, to the flow of copious dissertation; and in Plato every grace is found. His style appears to possess a principle of self-adaptation, by which it responds, with miraculous facility, to each varied mood of sentiment and passion. He is at once a satirist, a rhetorician, a critic, a fabulist, and, when he pleases, a sophist. We follow him with admiration through all his changes; we are charmed with him under all aspects; but most, perhaps, in those introductory or incidental passages of narrative or description, wherein he combines the skill of a

consummate artist with the rich and eloquent enthusiasm of a devout lover of the beautiful.

To this vein of mingled fancy and reason; to this Proteus-like pliancy of style; to this profusion of picturesque and glowing imagery; the strongest of all possible contrasts is seen in the works of him, who has exerted, and down to the present hour continues to exert, an influence commensurate with that of Plato upon the whole fabric of philosophy. Were it not that there is somewhat of a kindred spirit in the acuteness and dexterity with which both wield the weapon of analysis; that there is an agreement in many of their fundamental doctrines, and their abstract principles of taste; and that a sort of filial tenderness perceptibly moderates the tone of the pupil when alluding to his master; it would be impossible to believe that ARISTOTLE* was for twenty years the disciple, and during a large portion of that period the *favourite* disciple of Plato. For, in the method of philosophizing, in the matter and limits assigned to philosophy, and in the proposed end and object of some of its branches, the chief of the Peripatetics places himself in decided opposition to the founder of the Academy. With him commenced that war between *empiricism* and *rationalism*, as they are technically called, which has raged ever since. But in style the difference of the two leaders is perhaps most deeply marked; and certainly not to the advantage of Aristotle. The fair and flowing stream of Plato's eloquence seems to have sunk without effect into the arid texture of his pupil's mind. A contempt of the flowers of diction, a

* B. C. 384—322.

resolute rejection of ornament, are the prominent features of the Aristotelian style. It is so dry as to approach the confines of dulness; so elliptical as frequently to border on the enigmatic. Moreover, it wants the easy command of idiomatic phraseology, the genuine Atticism, with which Plato captivates his readers. We detect in it decided traces of that corruption of the Athenian dialect, which dates from the era of Alexander, and are already called upon to mourn over the decay of the noblest vehicle ever invented for the thoughts of man. Yet Aristotle, in spite of all the faults that may be imputed to him, is great even as a writer. Austere and tuneless as his composition is, it is so pregnant with thought, so "instinct with spirit," and sometimes so enlivened by a true feeling of the lofty or the tender, that it seldom fails to rouse the attention or to interest the heart. Nor is he altogether devoid of a certain touch of humour, not transgressing the bounds of philosophic decorum; a mixture of slyness and apparent simplicity; that has a poignant effect when he chooses to display it. Amid his multifarious productions the best specimens of his literary powers are those most universally known; that ethical treatise, which, through a veil of some perplexity and self-contradiction, discloses so many glimpses of truth; that inestimable work on rhetoric, which is still the manual of the art of persuasion; that code of the laws of poetry, which, though but a mutilated fragment, embraces all the principles of just criticism, and the germs of the most popular and brilliant theories that, from time to time, have enriched the philosophy of taste.

Within the compass of the classical age of Greek

composition, the literature of philosophy presents no other prominent points. But we have not yet exhausted the glories of that period. Those proud and palmy times gave birth to another kind of intellectual production, which can flourish, in full grandeur, only on soils that are blessed at once with the presence of liberty and of genius.

Greece was the first theatre in the world for oratory; of all Greece, Athens was the most splendid and renowned arena. Yet, notwithstanding the high rewards of eloquence, which the constitution of that state held forth, it was long before eloquence was cultivated, within her bosom, as a regular art. The elder Athenian statesmen, even those most famed for their success in the assemblies of the people, seem to have studied little how to ensure or to heighten the effect of their natural talents. Perhaps the speeches, which the character of ancient history allowed to be intermingled with the narrative, and in which it was the evident aim of some historical writers to display the full force of their political and oratorical abilities, supplied the earliest evidence of the magnificent results attainable by assiduous care and elaborate preparation. Then eloquence arose as an art and a branch of instruction. Schools for the inculcation of its principles were opened at Athens, and no price was thought too high for the lessons of an eminent professor. It cannot be denied that the influence of this methodical training was not always fortunate. Thus, it would have been better for Isocrates, had he never imbibed an affected prettiness and a finical modulation from the example and the rules of Georgias. But it is equally undeniable that by such scholastic discipline, and by private toils and

trials, too arduous and unremitting for modern impatience to undergo, was matured that perfection of style, proof, in its intrinsic strength and beauty, against all changes of manners, times, and circumstances, which still astonishes and awes the mind in the pages of DEMOSTHENES.* Out of the list of Attic orators, the judgment of the Alexandrian critics selected ten as foremost in fame and merit: but posterity has narrowed the number. When we now speak of the triumphs of Greek eloquence, it is not of Lysias, however pure in dialect and transparent in expression; nor of Isocrates, with the unvarying seesaw of his balanced antitheses; nor of Isæus, though skilled in the science of arrangement, and armed with bursts of manly indignation; nor even of Æschines, who is yet so argumentative, so plausible, and so powerful withal, that it is difficult to imagine him prostrated at the feet of a victorious rival; it is not of any, nor of all of these, that we are understood to speak, but of the great luminary that eclipsed every other light, and shines in unapproachable splendour. The striking fact that in Demosthenes we find the only consummate orator that Athens herself ever produced, may impress upon us the extreme difficulty of the art which he practised. Greece can boast an array of five or six illustrious poets, of three great historians, of at least two philosophers who take a high place in literature; but she has only one Demosthenes. This eulogium will not be condemned as extravagant by those who have studied with all the attention, which such works deserve to have bestowed on them, the series of his

* B. C. 382—322.

political speeches ; the attacks upon Philip, and defences of his own administration, summed up and carried to the loftiest pitch of conceivable excellence, in the wonderful oration on the Crown. For the complete enjoyment of this master-piece of eloquence, an essential preparation is the perusal of the great speech of the accuser ; that admirable effort, which for a moment seems to raise *Æschines* almost to the *Demosthenean* level, and must extort from every one the question, "how could this be answered or evaded?" But a mere glance at the reply of *Demosthenes* at once explains the defeat of his opponent. What power ! what art ! what nature ! what elaboration ! A heathen need not have scrupled to exclaim, that to purchase the glory of this matchless triumph it would have been worth while to live the life of *Demosthenes*, and to die his death !

When *Alexander*, after the destruction of *Thebes*, demanded the surrender of the *Athenian* orators, he showed at once his hatred of liberty, and his clear perception of the means that had most effectually sustained it. This act was far from inconsistent with the spirit in which, amid the horrors of an exterminating conquest, he had spared the dwelling and the descendants of *Pindar*. He intended a death-blow to *Greek* oratory ; but he held himself forth as delighted to cherish and reward all less dangerous manifestations of intellect ; and the declension of literature, which was one of the most signal results of his ambitious career, was at the same time a severe and a felt retribution for his political crimes. Well might he sigh in vain for a great poet to celebrate his exploits ; he, who by his own deeds had trampled out the fires of genius, and polluted the true sources

of fancy and natural emotion. We mark with regret, but without surprise, the change that, from the period of his ascendancy, began to affect the various developments of the Grecian mind. Eloquence died away in the sickly languor of Oriental affectation. History, seeming to catch its tone from the extravagant projects and romantic adventures of the conqueror, became a tissue of bombast, compliment, and fable. Science, indeed, flourished in many of its branches ; for science does not scorn the patronage of despotism, and often requites its munificence by aiding its designs ; but all the charms of the art of composition, whose noblest efforts have ever sprung from the impulse of unfettered minds, fled with the extinction of freedom.

The victorious sword of Alexander opened a way, however, for the diffusion of Greek literature over half the globe, and carried a knowledge of its attractions to the very confines of China. But, though it lingered long in different quarters, it was in Egypt that the principal effort was made, after the death of the Macedonian prince, to form a new focus of letters and mental refinement. All influences were brought together, that could contribute to make Alexandria be, what Athens had been, the capital of the intellectual world ; all, except the presence of those Muses, who could not be compelled to migrate from the clime of their birth. The liberal dynasty of the Ptolemies encouraged learning and learned men ; collected libraries ; founded universities ; and was repaid by the too frequent produce of such institutions. The new Greek literature was the literature of courtiers and grammarians. Even the Alexandrian poetry, the most favourable side on which that literature can

be viewed, is the poetry of art and labour, not of nature. Let APPOLLONIUS RHODIUS* be selected as perhaps the best specimen of the school to which he belonged. Of him we must say that, if epic poetry required no invention, no fire, no enthusiasm, but only a profound acquaintance with mythology, and an elegant and studied diction, he would be a great epic poet ; but that, as it is, he is only an epic compiler of traditions, with here and there a touch of tenderness or passion. One pleasing species of poetry, of which only a faint prelude had been heard in elder times, was certainly brought to perfection during the Alexandrian period : but it arose in another country, and was merely allured from its native seat by the patronage of Ptolemy Philadelphus. It may be a question with some, whether the Idyll, the Greek shape of pastoral song, gained or lost by the nearer view of courts and capitals, which royal favour enabled the Sicilian THEOCRITUS† to take : yet as a tablet of human life and manners, the true function, according to its name, of this kind of composition, its province was perhaps rightly so extended as to embrace certain features of civic as well as of rural society. On either field Theocritus is equally at home ; but in an especial manner have the force and simplicity of his painting given a warmth and truth to his representations of rustic characters and incidents, that are scarcely to be found in any later pastorals. It required his strength, his sweetness, and his genuine Doric, to confer real interest on the loves and strifes of shepherds and shepherdesses ; and the difficulty of succeeding in the treatment of such

* B. C. 200.

† B. C. 270.

subjects is signally demonstrated by the care with which those writers, who are generally classed with Theocritus under the head of Bucolic poets, the showy Bion, and the delicate Moschus, have in fact avoided the actual scenes of the pastoral world. But these authors, or at least the latter of them,* lived at a time when neatness and smoothness had become the characteristics of Greek poetry, and when its choicest productions were fit only to bloom in an anthology. Symptoms of recovered manhood, in a different department of literature, appear at a later period: but, meanwhile, in order to continue our review of the great productions of mind, we must pass to another people, and to the treasures of a sister tongue.

Inferior to Greece in the genius of its inhabitants, and perhaps in the intrinsic greatness of the events of which it was the theatre, unquestionably inferior in the fruits of intellectual activity, ITALY holds the second place in the classic literature of antiquity. The early state of that country, viewed in its whole extent from north to south, presents nothing to court the eye of the literary observer. In some respects, indeed, the Etrurian name is important and attractive. Etruria could boast of arts, legislation, scientific knowledge, a fanciful mythology, and a form of dramatic spectacle, before the foundations of Rome were laid. But, like the ancient Egyptians, the Etrurians made no progress in composition. Verses of an irregular structure, and as rude in sense as in harmony, appear to have formed the highest limit of their literary achievements. Nor did even the

* Moschus, B. C. 154.

opulent and luxurious Greeks of southern Italy, while they still retained their independence, contribute as much as their Sicilian kinsmen to the glory of letters in the west. It was only in their fall that they did good service to the cause. All the disgrace of their political humiliation was amply redeemed by the honour of communicating the first impulse towards intellectual refinement to the bosoms of their conquerors. When, in the process of time, Sicily, Macedonia, and Achaia had become Roman provinces, some acquaintance with the language of their new subjects, grew to be a matter almost of necessity to the victorious people : but the first impression made at Rome by the productions of the Grecian muse, and the first effort to create a similar literature, must be traced to the earlier conquest of TARENTUM.* It was in consequence of that event, that, after five centuries of war, the harp was at last heard above the din of arms, in the destined capital of the world.

From that memorable period, the adroit and versatile talents, which have not failed to distinguish the Greek race in every stage of national decline, began to exercise a powerful influence on the Roman mind. That influence was felt in different departments of education and amusement. The instruction of the Roman youth was committed to the skill and learning of Greek slaves ; the substance or spirit of the Greek drama was transferred into the Latin tongue ; and somewhat later, but with an effect more deep and permanent, Roman genius and ambition devoted their united energies to the study of Greek rhetoric, which long continued to be the guide and

* B. C. 272.

model of those schools, in whose exercises the abilities of Cicero himself were trained. True it is that prejudice or patriotism made some sturdy endeavours to resist this flood of foreign innovation ; but taste and curiosity, once excited, were too impetuous to be withstood. The elegant ardour of the Scipios and their followers overcame an opposition commenced by the watchful jealousy of the elder Cato. For more than a century and a half after the Tarentine war we discover symptoms of a legislative effort to counteract the predominance of Greek philosophy and eloquence. But the decrees of senates and the edicts of censors were equally vain. It was written in the fates that the best part of Roman literature should be only successful plagiarism.

One thing tempered the servility of this imitative tendency. In every genuine Latin writer, even though not belonging by birth to the capital, we recognise the pride of Roman citizenship. That sentiment breaks out not merely in the works of great statesmen and warriors, who, aspiring to shine in literature as well as in politics, naturally allowed their attempts in the one field to take something of their tone from the high station and authority that pertained to them in the other ; but quite as strikingly in the productions of those to whom the literary character was all in all. It is as prominent in Virgil and Horace as in Cicero or Cæsar. If ever the language of Rome, in other respects so inferior to that of Greece, has any real advantage over the sister tongue, it lies in that accent of dignity and command which seems inherent in its tones. The austerity of power is not shaded down by those graceful softening and qualifying adjuncts, so agreeable to the dis-

position of the most polished Grecian communities. In the Latin forms and syntax we are everywhere conscious of a certain energetic majesty and forcible compression. We hear, as it were, the voice of one who claims to be respected and resolves to be obeyed.

When we regard solely the bright vein of genius that shines through all the plagiarism of the Latin authors, it seems impossible not to wish that they had added to this the charm of originality : but a little consideration of what Italy was, and what she had produced, in remoter times, will convince us that, without some lively external impulse, it was not likely that a literary era should ever have commenced in that country. Ingenious men have indeed discovered, or dreamed that they could discover, a primitive Latin literature of heroic ballads ; evolving by their own fancy, rather than under the guidance of authentic evidence, a series of epic romances out of the ancient history of Rome. But it is hard to believe that such a literature, if it existed, or if it possessed any features of excellence, could have been utterly swept away by the ravages of the Gauls : and the fact undoubtedly is, that the few poetical remnants of the earlier ages which still survive, verses of a religious or triumphal character, display rudeness unredeemed by traces of a hopeful and exuberant simplicity. They are far inferior to the songs of many savage tribes with which modern enterprise has made us acquainted. Nor is it probable that the coarseness of these Saturnian lays was much improved by the first dramatic attempts which were made at Rome, on the Tuscan or Campanian model.

Suddenly a Greek slave, brought, after the final subjugation of southern Italy, to the capital of Latium,

gave the Romans an insight into the real nature of epic and dramatic poetry. LIVIUS ANDRONICUS* translated into Latin verse the *Odyssey* of Homer. By a version of only one other poem could he have conferred a nobler boon upon a people, now at last awakening to the charms of intellectual cultivation. But perhaps he judged well in his selection. The more elaborate plan and severer graces of the *Iliad* might not at once have engaged so much general attention as the romantic rambles of Ulysses: whereas the wondrous tale of those immortal wanderings was sure to arouse that appetite which "grows with what it feeds on." Previously to thus laying the foundations of the Roman epos, the same author had introduced upon the stage, hitherto occupied by buffoonery and extemporaneous sarcasm, specimens of the regular drama, translated from Greek tragedy and comedy. That the more grave of these exotic productions never struck a deep root into the soil of Rome, is a fact sufficiently notorious. Nor is it difficult to discover the cause. Precisely as the *Odyssey* was fitted, by its amusing and often homely narrative, to captivate the affections of a semi-barbarous nation, even before they could appreciate its higher beauties, so the broader attractions of comedy were certain to take precedence of that appeal to the more refined sensibilities of our nature, which is made by the tragic muse. And when taste was finally matured among the admirers of Cicero and Virgil, political causes prevented that resistance to the growing passion of the populace for show and spectacle, which tragedy, under other circumstances, might have effectually

* B. C. 240.

offered. But comedy, though her legitimate forms were ultimately forced away by the same rage for gladiatorial combats, and gorgeous pageants, enjoyed a season of triumph which will claim for it especial notice as we proceed to review the successive stages of Roman literature.

The chronological position of Livius, and the striking effects which resulted from his labours, give importance to his name, though the fragments ascribed to his pen are few in number, and of these the most polished are evidently spurious. But the next memorable author may rest his claim to the high title of the *Father of Roman Song* upon something better than mere antiquity. ENNIUS* not only naturalized, by a work of some extent, hexameter verse in Italy; he not only conveyed into his own tongue the genuine spirit of Homer along with that measure which was most favourable to such a transfusion; but he was, in every sense of the word, a true poet. Of the Greeks he was indeed, to the very letter, a devout imitator; but holding, as he had a fair right to do, the perfect models bequeathed by them steadily before his eyes, and adopting much of their expression as frankly as later Latin writers adopted much of his own, he yet displayed an original and a Roman spirit, in the choice and treatment of some of his principal subjects. It was thus that he got such possession of the national mind, as to justify a philosopher, posterior by nearly three centuries to himself, in speaking of his countrymen as *an Ennian people*. Something or other, it must be observed, from the hand of Ennius, encountered

* B. C. 239—169.

them in almost every branch of composition. Even in prose the versatility of his powers found scope for exertion. But poetry, throughout its chief varieties, was his favourite field. His poems were by turns epic, tragic, satiric, epigrammatic, and didactic. Perhaps, among them all, to judge by the surviving specimens, we have most reason to regret the loss of those versified chronicles of Rome, whose plan, as the reader instantly perceives, was too naked and simple, but whose defects of arrangement seem to have been compensated by the feeling which dictated the theme, and the vigour with which it was sustained. Here we are still able to detect indications of that which pleases an unsophisticated taste in all early literature; that seizure of minute traits and circumstances, and that graphic manner of portraying them, which charm so much in the poetry of Homer and Chaucer, and would have no less charmed in the poetry of Ennius, had his productions reached us in a state of equal preservation.

We are by no means puzzled to assign a reason for the variety observable in the works of this literary patriarch. His access to the manifold stores amassed by Grecian genius had made him intellectually rich, and he was in a hurry to pour out, before the astonished gaze of his contemporaries, a full display of his opulence. But his successors, less actuated by the impatient desire to exhibit a new acquisition, had leisure to pause, to discriminate, and to attach themselves, with a judicious preference, to the kind of composition best suited to their natural powers. Thus, while some attempted tragedy and some compiled annals, the comic drama, alluring by the prospect of gain as well as by its adaptation to the bent

of their minds, was the province on which the most celebrated among the immediate followers of Ennius reaped their laurels. **PLAUTUS*** and **TERENCE** have at least this in common, that they both aimed at immediate popularity, and by cultivating the same branch of the poetical art ; but they seem to have availed themselves of almost every facility for differing which the existing scope of comic poetry afforded. The difference between them lies not so much in their choice of a model ; since though Plautus to a certain extent followed Epicharmus, he for the most part resorted for his materials, as steadily as Terence himself, to the New Comedy of the later Attics ; but it lies in the tone and temper of their minds, and in those properties of sentiment and style, which reveal the original qualifications of a dramatist through the most slavish transcription of fable and manners. In reading Plautus we are provoked to wish that one, who was imbued with so large a share of the Aristophanic spirit, in its grosser attributes, had made the Old Comedy, in all its extent, his exemplar rather than the New, and had thus provided a more proper vent for the coarse humour, the buffoonery, and even the poetry, that were within him. But in Terence, whether or not he equalled the selectest graces of Menander, we find an elegance worthy of Athens in the best of those days when she had learned to substitute a scrupulous refinement for more noble and commanding beauties. Even of Plautus the language is pure and flowing ; not, indeed, controlled by much deference to the laws of metrical harmony, but full of pith and sprightliness, bearing the stamp of collo-

* Plautus died, B. C. 184.—Terence, B. C. 195—159.

quial vivacity, and suitable to the general briskness of his scenes. Yet we miss all symptoms of deference, in the tone of his dialogue, to the taste of the more polished classes of society. The plan and denouement of his plots are carelessly contrived. Gaiety, surprise, plays on words, puns, low jokes, reprobate manners, caricature, rather than character and true humour, have been aimed at and achieved by Plautus.

Terence is as much above him in regularity and dramatic art, as in elegance and harmony. He laid his plans with more solicitude, and hit the essence of human character with a finer perception. But the charm, the glory of Terence, is his style. He seems to have weighed each particular word in the balance of an unerring judgment. Hence he was, and is, exquisitely delightful to every cultivated mind. As a mere comic writer, his fault lay in pitching his style too high. There was not sufficient breadth and grotesqueness for the appetite of the million. He was deficient in coarse jocularities, and so the people left him, in the midst of some of his best pieces, for the tricks of a rope-dancer! Such was the temper of the Roman populace, who liked to laugh with their mouths wide open, and who, by enforcing a compliance with their sovereign will, produced the ruin of the genuine drama.

We pause, for a moment, at the era of Terence, to mark the rapid improvement of the language spoken and understood in Rome. At the end of five centuries unadorned by literary efforts, it had been rough, unfixed, and inharmonious: at the end of fifty years, since the commencement of its literature, it was graceful in its idioms, settled in its principles,

and pleasing to the ear. Sprung from the same Pelasgian source with the Greek, but mixed to a larger extent with barbarous additions, and retarded in its progress by the habits of Italian life, the Latin tongue, when Livius Andronicus wrote, was still a crude and rugged element. With Ennius appeared the first traces of amelioration. Plautus advanced some steps. But Terence outstrode all competitors, and reached the goal. We cannot mention a Latin author who excels him. Yet this boast of Roman letters, this model of composition in the Roman language, was a foreigner and a slave!

It was not until half a century later that true Romans came into the field with a blaze of splendour that has never forsaken their names. Something, however, had been accomplished by them before the brilliant days of Cicero, Cæsar, and Lucretius. LUCILIUS* had moulded the careless effusions, half-humorous, half-sarcastic, of the Ennian school, into the first regular form of Roman satire; that form, in which the originality of this species of poetry consists, for, with regard to its essence, Lucilius was deeply read in the Greek Old Comedy and Iambic invectives, and merely clothed the spirit, learned from them, with a new external dress of hexameter verse, his favourite mode of composition. Still earlier, however, and in a different department of letters, we are called upon to distinguish the names of CATO THE CENSOR, and of FABIUS PICTOR.† Had anything except his agricultural journal descended to us in a state of good preservation, it might have been possible

* B. C. 148—103.

† M. Porcius Cato, B. C. 234—149. Fabius Pictor, about B. C. 220.

to praise, on other grounds than those of traditionary fame, the nervous style and masculine eloquence of Cato. But in that treatise he writes like a farmer ; and of his other productions, nothing but fragments or uncertain reports have survived. Quintus Fabius Pictor is selected, as the most ancient compiler, in prose, of his country's annals ; though his improbabilities, absurdities, and inconsistencies, of which one of his successors loudly complains, appear to fix upon him the title of fabulist rather than even of chronicler. VARRO,* likewise, whose life was protracted beyond the deaths of the great men enumerated at the beginning of this paragraph, came into the world before them. He was, among other things, an agriculturist, a grammarian, a critic, a theologian, an historian, a philosopher, a satirist. Of his miscellaneous works considerable portions are extant, sufficient to display his erudition and acuteness, yet in themselves more curious than attractive. When Petrarch hailed him as the third light of Rome, he was moved, no doubt, by that pedantry, which, in the constitution of his mind, was so largely blended with genius. To us the circumstance of main interest, connected with these authors, is the light thrown by their style and subjects upon the rise of Latin literature. We cannot fail to be struck by the early appearance of prose composition ; but we at once detect its source in the imitative nature of that literature. Where original genius has to pioneer its own way, some time usually elapses before the natural tendency, produced by many causes, to metrical and rhythmical effusions, subsides into an aptitude for composition in prose :

* M. Terentius Varro, B. C. 116—28.

but far more rapid is the progress towards this extension of literary labours, where the chief task and aim of authorship are to copy antecedent models. The choice of subjects is the other remarkable feature of the epoch to which we have alluded. It shows, on the one hand, that fondness of the ancient Italians for rural life, which so long retarded the improvement of their language and the dawn of intellectual refinement ; while, on the other hand, the works of Varro alone sufficiently testify that not a century had elapsed from the first appearance of literature at Rome, before men of learning, in the peculiar sense of that appellation, were mingled with her poets and annalists. Of the want of freshness in the Roman literature, this is a striking evidence. It can scarcely be said to have passed through the fair and amiable gradations of infancy and youth. All at once came upon it the lineaments of manhood, and even these were soon darkened and sullied by some shades of incipient decrepitude.

Free, however, from every trace of decay or decline, and exhibiting only the pride and beauty of consummate vigour, are those productions which, better than their deeds on the arena of war and politics, have immortalized CICERO* and CÆSAR. The coetaneous existence of these remarkable men, and the close relation in which they stood to each other in public life, would force us to view them together, were there no affinity between them as authors. But, in their case, it is assuredly a bond of literary connection, that they both display the perfection of Latin prose, and supply the purest re-

* Cicero, B. C. 106—43. Cæsar, B. C. 100—44.

pository of diction available for that species of composition. Perhaps, too, though their styles are very differently coloured, both were alike fastidious in the selection of words and arrangement of sentences. The exquisite simplicity of the one might be as much the result of art as the swelling pomp of the other. But their art was applied in separate directions. Cicero, not less than Cæsar, was a practical man: but Cæsar, probably by a continual effort, has communicated to his writings also the practical character. Though he wrote quick, we cannot believe that he wrote carelessly; yet while his taste was ever on the watch, while he never misplaced a word, nor was guilty of an inelegance, he stamped an impression of unaffected earnestness, an air of business, on every thing that dropped from his pen. Cicero permits the artist always to be visible; nay not merely permits, but glories in the revelation of his pains and skill. He wishes to be detected in his work-shop with his tools around him. He is uneasy lest the reader should not esteem him sufficiently elaborate.

Had the orations of Cæsar come down to us in an unmutilated shape, we might have instituted a more full comparison between him and Cicero. For it is chiefly as an orator that Cicero is made the subject of criticism. From the remotest times eloquence ranked high at Rome, as a personal accomplishment, and a means of obtaining or preserving power: from the date of the first appearance of polite learning, the art of rhetoric began to be sedulously cultivated. It would be easy to crown a long paragraph with the names of distinguished speakers, who owed to their eminence in this respect the proudest political triumphs. But of their harangues little more is left

than of their greatness. On the field of literature Cicero towers alone, to maintain the cause of Latin against Grecian eloquence,—and to demonstrate the inferiority of the one to the other. Various reasons have been assigned for the subordination of Roman oratory when put in contrast with that of the Greeks; but the true causes were inherent and unavoidable. One of these causes lies in the innate difference of the Greek and Latin languages; the Greek, by its forms and idioms, susceptible of vast copiousness, and an unwearied flow of thought, pressing on, through clauses and sentences, in regular progression; the Latin, trained to a more periodic turn of composition, yielding indeed ample room for diffuse expression and imagery, but not chaining thought to thought with the same logical coherence or magnetic impulse and attraction. This discrepancy of the two tongues becomes extremely obvious in lyric poetry. It is impossible not to perceive it in comparing Horace with Pindar. And we hold that it prevails hardly less in the higher branches of eloquence: that it would have been impracticable for Cicero to speak in the strain of Demosthenes—with equal closeness, equal energy, and a like impetuosity of passion, feeling, and argument, kindling into fire from their own vehemence, and disdaining all splendour that does not flame out naturally from the subject itself and the most direct mode of treating it. The other great cause of the imperfection of Latin oratory arises from the necessarily artificial nature of all imitation. In Cicero we uniformly see the rhetorician; in Demosthenes we see the man. Demosthenes, such was his skill, seems anxious merely about what he is to say; Cicero, about how

he is to say it. He was right in rating high the difficulties of the orator's art; he was either wrong in the method he took to master them, or deficient in power to do so. Partly, perhaps, he was scared by the formidable estimate made by himself of the endowments requisite for success in public speaking. These, as enumerated by Cicero, we may almost compare with the list of accomplishments which Imlac* demands in the poet; and here, too, we are tempted to exclaim, "enough! thou hast convinced us that no human being can ever be an orator."

At least, to be a true one, he must not study with too much devotion in the school of Cicero. There is, however, another department of intellectual exertion, in which Cicero may be mentioned as a model, to whose excellence hardly a sufficient tribute has been paid. In philosophy, in the application of original thought to the analysis of mind, and of the moral sense, and to the illustration of their phenomena, his rank is low: but as a philosophic writer he cannot be placed too high. For the exposition of principles imparted by others his genius and style were admirably fitted. Everything conspires to make us regard him, in this capacity, with unalloyed pleasure. His ethical and metaphysical labours were crowded into the close of his active life, and fill up the picture of an amiable character. The tumults of ambition, the noise of forensic and senatorial warfare, the anxieties of personal danger, seem forgotten, as he receives and repeats the lessons of Plato.

Contemporary with Cæsar and Cicero was LUCRETIUS,† the most original, and perhaps, in spite

* See *Rasselas*.

† B. C. 95—52.

of his subject, the most beautiful of the Latin poets. It was with reference to the confident and commanding manner of this noble writer, often rising into a high pitch of scornful indignation, that Dryden ascribed to him a perpetual dictatorship: but the same sort of arbitrary will and power may be perceived in his treatment of the stubborn topics, on which a fond attachment to the Epicurean philosophy induced him to exercise his genius. If in anything his subject controlled him, it was in suggesting, as consonant with its own quaintness and austerity, the use of a diction still overrun, even at that Ciceronian era, with the rust of preceding times. But in how many points did he control his subject!—a subject so extensive indeed, yet, poetically considered, so unpromising as “the nature of things.” With what a soul does he animate the abstract doctrines of his Grecian master! With what a bodily grace and presence does he then clothe them, and bring them down into the region of sense, and equip them with a picturesque and brilliant garniture! With what charming episodes he relieves the dulness of didactic matter; and even where the heavy theme appears settling into a “palpable obscure,” what quick flashes are thrown out of the deepest gloom! If it be true that Lucretius composed his poem during the lucid intervals of a mental disease, we might infer that somewhat of the inspiration of madness pervades its descriptive passages. In such passages alone, it may be added, is the didactic writer really a poet. Where he unfolds a system, he is merely a versifier; it is where he illustrates and embellishes it, that fancy asserts her empire. As an imaginative portrayer of nature, Lucretius has

no superior. Some of his very faults, in relation to a pure standard of morals, arise out of his transcendent powers of description. He sees everything with such intense perspicacity, he paints everything in hues so rich and vivid, that, where his theme is indelicate or voluptuous, this irrepressible faculty produces results that are doubly revolting.

Within the limits of the same period we have to notice the sparkling productions of CATULLUS and of SALLUST.* In the works of both we trace the paramount influence of Greek models. Of itself Roman literature had not reached, at the date of Catullus, that era when it would have been natural for the learned or pathetic elegy, or the smart epigram, to make their appearance. But with a style half-Grecian, and a taste wholly so, it was no wonder that he looked for an example to the poetry of Greece, and finding one province yet uninvaded, imbibed and introduced the spirit of the Alexandrian school. Even into his lyric poetry, and his attempts in heroic metre, he infused partly the pensive feeling of his masters in elegiac verse, and partly the grace and point of epigram. But besides this incongruity, which is unquestionably a fault, Catullus errs by being too confined in his range of thought and subjects. He is too tiny a writer. He never produced any thing equal to his genius.

Sallust, in a different department of letters, has some strong symptoms of affinity with this learned poet. Circumstances have even caused, through the loss of the larger portion of his writings, that Sallust should resemble Catullus in the scantiness of

* Catullus about B. C. 87. Sallust, B. C. 86—34.

his literary remains. But more striking than this accidental similarity is that prematureness of style which, in both, could have arisen out of nothing else than the spirit of imitation. In the ordinary progress of events, Sallust should have followed Livy, instead of preceding him; that is, the deep thinker, full of moral and political wisdom, should have come after the lively, eloquent, and picturesque historian. Not that Sallust is deficient in the power of vivid painting. He could not devoutly study and strive to emulate Thucydides without cultivating that faculty. Still, it is always evident that he is more ambitious of being profound than of displaying any other quality; and, fascinating as his compositions are, it would have been better for his fame had he not so often forced upon the finest passages the mannerism of his Grecian master, and darkened their meaning by the use of antiquated diction.

VIRGIL, HORACE, and LIVY* must next be grouped together, not only because they lived in the same age, but likewise as the brightest specimens of that splendid era which derives its name, as it derived much of its character, from the sovereignty of Augustus. In some respects this was the golden time of Latin literature—rendered so, to a great extent, by the judicious patronage of the emperor himself, and of those exalted persons who imitated his example. Nor should we be surprised at the signal difference between the effect of Augustan patronage upon the literature of Rome, and that of the patronage of the Ptolemies upon the literature of Greece. The latter was directed to an original literature, al-

* Virgil, B. C. 70—19. Horace, B. C. 65—8. Livy, B. C. 59—17.

ready on the decline, whose inspiration had been freedom, and the ambition to excel; the patronage of Augustus and his court was bestowed upon an imitative literature, still aiming at improvement, whose inspiration was taste and the ambition to please. This, too, produced the vast increase of nationality, which became conspicuous in the writings of the Augustan age. Though much of the expression and the ornament of these writings was faithfully copied from the Greeks, yet the subjects were more exclusively Roman or Italian. Their very flattery of existing power gives a national tone to the strains of the poets. Virgil and Horace never suffer us to forget that the master of half the world was master also of Rome and of themselves.

We need say but little of the eclogues of Virgil, the amusements of his youth, in which, with all his love of nature, he is never natural, and with the wish to imitate the Sicilian model he has not ventured distinctly to echo the accents of Theocritus. But, with far different power, and a more true conception of Italian scenery and agricultural life, he has given in the Georgics a specimen of didactic poetry, in which we can regret nothing but the form. The more we study this consummate production, the more wonderful does it seem that it should have been written on command, and to serve a political purpose. But Virgil was here employed upon a theme eminently congenial to his taste and his affections. Here, too, he was more independent, both in the selection and in the treatment of his topics, than in any other part of his works. Hesiod was before his eyes only so far that Hesiod had likewise sung of rural scenes and occupations; but Virgil leads us into a new

country, filled with new images, and where we feel ourselves under the conduct of a nobler and more eloquent guide. Had the same degree of originality appeared in his epic poem, Virgil might better have supported a comparison, which it is now highly indiscreet in his admirers to institute, with the great minstrel of Greece. But, under existing circumstances, it is wonderful that any one should place the *Æneid* in competition with the works of Homer. It is deficient in the primary requisite for exciting a strong interest. The character of the hero is a blank; we neither sympathize with his feelings nor care for his success. How different from those prominent and commanding features that rivet our attention to the persons and the adventures of Achilles and the Wanderer of Ithaca! And for the poet's failure in this respect there is an obvious reason. The character of *Æneas* came not to him conveyed by the hot breath of a living tradition. He drew upon his fancy for the image, and that too under no livelier impulse than the wish to make the Trojan prince an allegory of the emperor Augustus. If such an inspiration was bad, the attempt to unite in one poem the distinct plans and excellences of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* was equally unfavourable to the structure and management of the plot. It has neither the concentrated dramatic interest of the first, nor the free scope and bewitching variety of the second. The *Æneid* has striking beauties; but it has not the peculiar charm of the *Iliad*—it has not the peculiar charm of the *Odyssey*. Had the wishes of Virgil with respect to its destruction been obeyed, the world would have lost much of splendid expression, dexterous imitation, and graceful imagery,

but we are not sure that much fame would have been sacrificed by the author of the *Georgics*.

Of all the great lights of Latin literature, HORACE, though an unblushing plagiarist with regard to the Greek originals, stands most alone in relation to his own countrymen. In lyric poetry he is not approached either by Catullus before him, or by Statius after him; in the easy flow of his epistolary verse he has no rival; and in satire, however we may rank his merits in comparison with those of Persius and Juvenal, his vein of liberal sarcasm and elegant philosophy is peculiar to himself. Perhaps the balanced judgment, the avoidance of extremes, so conspicuous in the rest of his writings, may be esteemed the true cause why his lyric efforts, pre-eminent as they are among the productions of the Roman muse, bear little resemblance to the nobler effusions of the Grecian masters. The very circumstances of Roman life, in the cultivated and intellectual classes, divided between political occupations, and the enjoyment of excessive luxury, and in either case adverse to that susceptibility of high and keen emotions which is essential to the development of the lyric faculty, opposed an obstacle to his success. But the temper of his mind increased the difficulties with which Horace had to contend. Where he merely translates the minor poems of Archilochus, Alcman, or Alcæus, or borrows detached thoughts and forms of expression from Pindar, we are pleased with his ingenuity; but, except once or twice on Roman subjects, which seem to have roused the pride of citizenship, we search in vain for the flow and fire of genuine enthusiasm. There is little of Pindaric ecstasy about him. In reading the odes of Horace we figure to ourselves

a man of genius, in some delightful retreat, following out the train of sentiments and images that arise in his mind, with great self-complacency and a design to please his patrons or his friends; but there is nothing like the Greek inspiration of a solemn festival, a public triumph, music sounding in the poet's ear, and nations hanging on his lips. In Horace we have point, terseness, and vivacity; in Pindar the glow of a "fine frenzy" and impetuosity hurrying us along in a breathless transport. These authors well display the opposite tendencies of their different languages;—the condensed vigour of the Roman periodic style—the mingled abruptness and diffusiveness of the not more manly, but more genial and enchanting Greek.

LIVY is the third great ornament of the Augustan period. In genius he might, perhaps, justly be ranked even above his poetical contemporaries. His originality alone, had he no other merit, seems to entitle him to this pre-eminence; since he struck out for himself a new path, remote at once from the crude and meagre style of Fabius Pictor and his followers, and from the affected mannerism and ambitious philosophy of Sallust. To rebut imputations upon his veracity, his impartiality, or his diligence in collecting facts and collating authorities, is not necessary here. Looking solely to his literary qualifications for writing history, it is impossible to conceive anything superior to his power of animated narrative and picturesque description, or to the freedom and acuteness with which he delineates striking characters as well as important events. The eloquence that yet lingered in his pages was a rich compensation to his own times, and still more to after

times, for the muteness of oratory in the forum and the senate-house.

Forced out of that sphere of exertion, which could not co-exist with Imperial despotism, however mild, Roman intellect now devoted itself, more exclusively than before, to the cultivation of the poetical faculty. Now too, a species of poetry, least congenial to the ancient manliness and iron nerves of the Roman character, came to be peculiarly distinguished. To the elegiac verses of Catullus, allusion has already been made; but the plaintive and amorous **TIBULLUS*** may more truly be regarded as the leader of this race of poets, the votaries of melancholy and of love. The impress of the Augustan epoch is deeply marked upon their writings, as it was upon their souls. They had ceased to struggle or to wish for liberty, and in their pleasure or their sorrow, they forgot the impulses of nobler sensations. Such is the tone of the Latin elegy, as it flowed from Tibullus. He has sensibility, tenderness, even enthusiasm, but an enthusiasm that dreams itself away in reveries of passionate fondness. His language is beautiful, but it has the feminine beauty of weakness: the rural landscapes, which he delights to draw, breathe an air of languor and repose. There is truth, indeed, in every line of his composition. How could it be otherwise, when he made his poems a chronicle of his life, and wrote from personal experience? This is the secret of that superior originality, when compared with his elegiac rivals, for which he has been so often praised. It is the originality which must arise from the study and the portraiture of self: for in mere mental vigour and

* B. C. 58.

ability he was unquestionably surpassed by PROPERTIUS.* Had the latter poet trusted more to his own resources, and less to acquired knowledge and foreign models; had he been more Propertius and less Callimachus, more a Roman and less an Alexandrian Greek, he must have gained a high reputation for truth and feeling, instead of that lower fame which attends ingenuity and learning. The erudition, the fruitful fancy, the unexampled fluency and ease, which distinguish OVID,† would not have advanced him, in this case, to a rank above Propertius, since the play of imagination without genuine sentiment, or the monotonous accents of a voluble but solitary grief, too often make up the sum and substance of his elegiac compositions. Ovid, however, has other, and perhaps stronger claims to admiration, as a writer of hexameter verse. His *Metamorphoses*, though the epigrammatic spirit is too prominent in them for a work of that extent, must without question be esteemed a production of great art, wit, and splendour. Pity that the art is frequently displayed at the expense of nature; that false wit is largely mingled with the true; that mere glitter seems to have satisfied the mind of Ovid as much as real brilliancy; and that, notwithstanding all his genius, he contributed, in no small degree, to hasten that decay of taste, which from this date becomes the leading characteristic of Latin literature.

In satirical composition alone, some may be inclined to dispute the fact of this decay. We no longer find, indeed, that intimate knowledge of human nature, that mitigated gall, and that agree-

* B. C. 51.

† B. C. 43—A. D. 18.

able variety, which adorn the satires of Horace. But no poet has grander conceptions or finer bursts of occasional tenderness, as well as majesty, than the too often depreciated PERSIUS.* He must have ranked higher in general estimation, had he not, with a mind of a very different cast, plodded too closely in the steps of Horace. His own sincere stoicism could not well put on the air of the Horatian worldly philosophy ; and his fierce censure of obscure persons and things is not a happy substitute for the delicate irony which Horace caused to play around all that was most prominent and brilliant in society. From such dark allusions, and from the crude metaphors in which Persius frequently conveys them, JUVENAL† is almost entirely free ; and it may reasonably be made a question whether his powers of indignant invective, his noble declamation, and his poetic fire, do not place him at the head of all the satirists. He is least indebted to Greek models ; a true Roman of the purest strain in his subjects, his sentiments, his diction, and his manner.

But with this exception, if it be allowed to be one, the palmy days of Roman literature had now expired. In prose and poetry, the symptoms of its rapid decline are equally manifest, as we pass in review those authors who followed the last years of Augustus. Into the former branch of composition a new and artificial taste was introduced by SENECA,‡ who was not so much a philosopher as a rhetorician, making display of his false eloquence upon philosophical subjects. The elder PLINY,§ in drawing his scientific knowledge from the Greeks, seems to have

* A. D. 34-62.

† A. D. 38-119.

‡ A. D. 2-65.

§ A. D. 23-79.

forgotten that a style of good Latinity would have been the best vehicle for conveying it to his countrymen. His manner of writing is not only laboured, but deformed with barbarous expressions, and words that have no vernacular authority. And though in *TACITUS** all the strength of Roman genius rallied for a latest effort, yet even the productions of his great mind are marked by peculiarities unlike the manhood of literature. Mannerism verging close on affectation, and the ambition of being always profound, have weakened the effect which must otherwise have resulted from his energy, his sensibility, his high morality, and his political sagacity. In his works, however, the glories of Latin prose find a more brilliant termination than if we extend the catalogue so as to embrace the panegyric on Trajan by *PLINY*† the Younger. The very faultlessness of that extolled attempt is faulty. Its modish beauties and finished workmanship too plainly bespeak an age in which the tricks of art were prized above sterling nature and simplicity.

The poetry of the same interval is not less infected with the great vice of exaggeration and bombast. *LUCAN*,‡ for example, affords a memorable instance of desperate exertions to force the sickly produce of artificial heat into rivalry with the fruits of natural genius. There was a relationship of mind as well as of blood between him and his uncle Seneca. Surrounded with servility, and subjected to a tyrant's yoke, he indemnified himself by extravagant pomp of language, and the eulogy of departed freedom, for an abject flattery of existing despotism, which after

* A. D. 60.

† A. D. 62—107.

‡ A. D. 38—65.

all proved in vain. Besides this defect, the poet of *Pharsalia* and the civil wars had likewise to contend with the political nature of his subject. The epic muse delights, indeed, in the shadowy realm of obscure traditional history, but she shrinks from the glare of ascertained and definite truth. A theme of that description compels a transference of poetical power from the management of incidents to the elaboration of diction and the painting of characters. Hence arises an abundance of mere rhetoric, of cold fire, that shines and sparkles with vast vehemence, but communicates no genial glow. The mistake of Lucan has been more than once repeated in later times, and against its depressing influence no energies ever struggled with perfect success.

Thus the decline and fall of Roman literature may be divided into three stages. Towards the close of the reign of Augustus, and during that of Tiberius, all that was great and elevating gradually disappeared. Poetry became a sordid device for attracting the overflowings of court favour; history sank into a hireling panegyrist, eloquence into an aimless exercise of the schools. The debasement of mind was accompanied by debasement of expression. For genuine strength of language, empty parade was substituted, and the semblance of sublimity, banished from thought, took refuge in words.

Between Tiberius and the epoch of Vespasian, the most remarkable characteristic of style was an eagerness for tinsel ornament, revealing itself in a rage for antithesis, a passion for tropes and figures, and a forcible introduction of poetical turns and phrases into prose.

The succeeding Cæsars, from Vespasian to the

Antonines, generally sought, by liberal encouragement, to revive the vigour of the Roman intellect ; but, with all their pains, they could not recall it from the bad direction it had taken. As Tiberius formerly, after the example of Augustus, had established a library, so Vespasian, so even Domitian, and so Trajan made collections of books, which served for little except to adorn the capital. Other efforts were not neglected. Vespasian, avaricious as he was, bestowed salaries on grammarians and rhetoricians : Titus lavished rewards upon orators, poets, and artists : Hadrian founded an athenæum for professors of rhetoric, poetry, and philosophy : Nerva and the Antonines set up schools in the great towns of the empire ; and Rome, Milan, and Marseilles were visited by numbers, who wished to cultivate mental endowments. But what did all these means and appliances, what did the emulation roused and the attempts made in other quarters effect ? The freedom of speech and writing, which Nerva and Trajan restored, arrested for a season, but could not prevent, the extinction of knowledge and of taste. Even the talents of Tacitus and the younger Pliny did not exempt them from the infection of the times ; and after their decease, during the latter half of this third period, the state of polite learning became every day more forlorn and hopeless. The authors became fewer and worse. The writers of prose were poor epitomists, or, if they ventured to be copious, their chief qualities were extravagance, credulity, and folly. The poets, from want of judgment, selected bad subjects, or spoiled every topic by a ridiculous phraseology. Poetry at last died away in the versification of men whose notions of harmony were con-

finer to the computation of syllables, and who thought the nerve and majesty of ancient composition were attained, when they pressed into their own vapid lines the obsolete words of Ennius and Lucilius. In the hundred and eightieth year of the Christian era, when the monster Commodus ascended the throne, he was able, by his crimes and cruelties, to outrage and degrade humanity. But Roman literature was beyond the reach of his despotism. It had already expired.

To complete the sketch of literary history in classical times, it is necessary only to notice the after-growth of Grecian literature, long posterior to the Alexandrian epoch, in which some of the raciness of ancient genius seemed to be renewed. Even during the height of Roman ascendancy, the Greek intellect had not failed to yield symptoms of life. Thus the historian POLYBIUS,* by the soundness of his judgment, by the proofs he gave of a practised understanding, such as became a statesman and a warrior, by the calm and masculine tone of his narrative, deserved the applause of all cultivated ages and the fame of a great political teacher. It is his style alone that condemns him to a subaltern rank in literature. In it we certainly detect a wide departure from pure Atticism, an admixture of Macedonian words and terminations, aggravated by the adoption of forms and inflections from the poets, and of technical phrases from the school of Aristotle. Yet so much was his work admired that, with a few exceptions, it was chosen as the model, both in matter and composition, by subsequent historians. To the

* B. C. 294—122.

acuteness and soundness of the matter, however, the majority of them made no near approach, while they fell even below the level of the style. They displayed more of the subtle diction of the schools, a greater attachment to poetical flowers, and all the vices of a gaudy rhetoric. Of all those who may be classed among the imitators of Polybius, the best writer was Dionysius of Halicarnassus; but it is requisite to pass by the generation in which he flourished, and to glance at the first three centuries after the birth of Christ, in order to recognise the temporary revival of the true Grecian spirit. In poetry, indeed, nothing very excellent appeared; but in biography, satire, history, and criticism, we find ample compensation for this deficiency. PLUTARCH,* notwithstanding many faults, wrote the lives of great men with a power and liveliness that shine through all his pedantry, all his far-fetched allusions, and all his incessant attempts at prettiness. LUCIAN,† Attic in his taste, and nearly Attic in his language, laughs with infinite good humour, and with wit seldom equalled, at the follies of an age which he could not mend. ARRIAN,‡ by the elegance and animation, as well as by the title, of his principal work, invites and almost sustains a comparison with Xenophon himself: and LONGINUS,§ the most sublime of systematic critics, though much of his phraseology is marked with the stamp of the third century, throws lustre upon that period by the perspicacity of his intellect, the force of his imagination, and the extent of his learning. His is the last individual name which we need mention in connection with ancient letters;

* A. D. 49—130.

† A. D. 122—200.

‡ A. D. 137—161.

§ A. D. 213—273.

but, before proceeding to a short review of the middle ages, as an introduction to modern literature, we must notice the chief mental phenomena that distinguish the whole interval between the reign of Hadrian and the death of Theodoric, an event with which antiquity may be said to close.

The first thing that strikes us in the writings, both Greek, and Latin, of those ages, is the prevalence of principles and opinions imported from the East. So early as in the time of Plutarch we perceive this tendency to orientalism of thought and manner. His Platonic philosophy takes within its range a considerable portion of eastern and Egyptian doctrine, drawn, it is true, from fountains at which Plato himself had drunk, but shown in a more open and undisguised character. Among other oriental contributions, the treasures of the Mosiac Scriptures, and the facts and precepts of Christianity, now began to exert a mighty influence on the progress of the human mind. Their operation, however, was not unopposed; and there is nothing more remarkable, in the intellectual history of our species, than the violent controversy that was long maintained between the Pagan theories and the poetical spirit of heathenism on the one hand, and the truths and maxims of divine revelation on the other. The contest terminated in the banishment of the Pagan philosophers by the emperor Justinian; but its effects survived in the literature of succeeding times, and can hardly be said to have yet wholly disappeared.

A warfare of antagonist principles, so interesting and important, could not be carried on without calling into action an eager appetite for inquiry and a fine display of original power. But partly from the

paramount impression made by oriental models, and partly from the controversial heat which led to a hurried and careless manner of composition, the Greek writings of the period we have specified are unfit to stand the test of a rigorous criticism. The heathen authors, who took a part in the great debate, are confused in arrangement and overladen in diction, and the fire and art of the Christian fathers are obscured by mysticism or injured by an Asiatic pomp and prodigality of phrase. If we look to the west, where the same battle was fought in the Latin language, we shall find the advantage undoubtedly on the side of the Christian polemics ; but provincialisms infest and corrupt their style almost as much as their bitterness, their unfairness, and their vanity misbecome the cause for which they wield the pen. During the fourth and fifth centuries this process of the debasement of the Roman tongue went on with great rapidity. The influence of the provincials began what the irruptions of the northern tribes consummated. In many scattered parts of the empire, it is probable that separate Latin dialects arose ; and the change upon the whole structure of the tongue could not fail to be prodigious when the Goths poured into Italy, established themselves in the capital, and began to speak and write in a language previously foreign to them. No one can marvel at the distinct traces of this alteration under the sway of Theodoric.* Here we drop the curtain upon ancient literature. Its rising will reveal new scenes, superior in variety, and not inferior in interest and beauty.

* A. D. 493—526.

The first part of the history of the United States of America is the period from the discovery of the continent by Christopher Columbus in 1492 to the establishment of the first permanent English colony in 1607. This period is characterized by the exploration of the continent by various European powers, including Spain, France, and the Netherlands. The second part of the history is the period from 1607 to the American Revolution in 1776. This period is characterized by the settlement of the eastern coast of North America by English colonists, the growth of the colonies, and the struggle for independence from British rule. The third part of the history is the period from 1776 to the present. This period is characterized by the development of the United States as a nation, the expansion of territory, the growth of industry, and the struggle for civil rights.

PART II.

ABOUT four hundred and fifty years, from the middle of the sixth century after Christ to the commencement of the eleventh, may be marked out as the period intervening between ancient and modern literature. At the first of these epochs, classical genius was already extinct; and purity of expression, in the classical tongues, was rapidly yielding to provincial corruptions and the influx of new elements of speech. At the second epoch, many causes conspired to work a great change on the face and fabric of society, and on the manifestations of human intellect. The ages that lie between, though connected by some evident links with those which follow them, have likewise some strong features peculiar to themselves. Throughout their course, the treasures of Greek and Latin composition, exposed to constant danger of perishing, and impaired by much actual loss, exerted no quickening influence even upon the minds of those who still used the tongues to which they belong. Indeed, although the knowledge of these rich remains was, in lapse of time, revived with prodigious effect, yet in the classic dialects themselves, no valuable addition was ever again made to the stores of polite learning. The history of Greek letters becomes now mixed up with that of the Byzantine Power; and the fate of both was the same. Neither fell at once by a sudden stroke: but there was a gradual decline

of mental as of political strength. In vain, at one period, did the aspiring Bardas,* whose encouragement of intellectual merit made some atonement for his ambition and his crimes, call to his aid the industry of Photius and the philosophy of Leo, in an attempt to reproduce the spirit of former days. Science, by these endeavours, was partially restored; but there was no corresponding restoration of literary vigour or elegance. In vain, under the sway of the Comnenian family,† did the erudition of Psellus and Eustathius, the female enthusiasm of princess Anna, essay to fan, upon the altar of the muses, an expiring flame. Occasional, desultory efforts could not stay the death of arts and empire in the east of Europe. In each the vital principle had disappeared long before the sword of the Turkish conqueror inflicted a final blow.

Latin literature experienced a destiny not less deplorable. When province after province of the Roman dominions was overrun by the northern hordes; when the imperial schools were suppressed; when the monuments of ancient genius were eagerly destroyed; minds already enfeebled, and a language already debased, could not be expected to contend successfully against so many adverse circumstances. Abandoned, for the most part, to those of the priestly profession, Latin composition was thenceforth no longer cultivated in a refined and liberal spirit. During the seventh and eighth centuries it degenerated into the rudeness of the monkish style, full of barbarous words and grammatical errors. It is true, that in the ninth century the care bestowed by Charle-

* Assassinated A. D. 866.

† A. D. 1057—1180.

magne upon the details of education produced some purifying effect upon the writings of the cloister; that the tenth century was distinguished by increased zeal in the task of transcribing the classical authors, which was not unattended by good results; and that, in the eleventh, the Latin works of the Normans display traces, if not of high polish, at least of masculine force and freedom. But neither then, nor at any subsequent date, did there appear a specimen of prose or poetry, in the Roman tongue, eminent enough to be noticed in a sketch that can touch upon only the most prominent and attractive points of literary history.

Even, therefore, as regards the middle age, it seems a mere abuse of terms to talk of a *double* literature. There was certainly a double employment of language; the corrupted Latin being appropriated to one class of compositions, the vernacular dialects of Northern Europe to another. Latin was the repository of such systematic knowledge as the times could boast; it was used in the service of the church; in the chronicles that supplied the place of history; in the very songs of the soldiery of the southern countries, some of which still rank amid the most curious relics of the ninth and tenth centuries. But it was not the vehicle of any great productions, stamped with true genius, and deeply impressing the mind of posterity. Still, genius was not altogether sunk and lost in every part of Europe. There were yet sundry emanations of it, conceived in a national vein, and expressed in national tongues of great antiquity. For these we must look to the NORTH; a region which not only sent out its daring tribes to change the aspect of civil life, but which furnished,

moreover, a fresh source of mental inspiration, destined at last to work together with the recovered influence of the classic spirit, and other prolific causes, in giving birth to the best portion of modern literature.

It is very easy for historical and literary inquirers to treat with contempt the intellectual achievements of our Celtic and Teutonic ancestors. Nevertheless it is certain that those proofs of a primitive relationship between them and the inhabitants of Greece, which are drawn from the affinities of language and of popular superstitions, may be strengthened by lively evidence that each people underwent the same process in first developing the mental faculties. Unfavourable circumstances long interfered with the regular growth and establishment of literature among the northern nations; but the grand elementary step towards a complete literature was very early attained by their independent efforts. Impulses, similar to those which awoke the Grecian lyre, operated with equal energy upon the natives of a less genial clime; and the poetry, thus called out from the depths of the human heart, was kindred in its character, as well as in its causes, with that, to whose first fruits, as far as their quality has been ascertained, we may, without injustice, compare it.

At the memorable epoch of the overthrow of the Roman dominion in the West,* the seats of the Teutonic race extended from the banks of the Rhine and the Danube to the rock-bound coasts of Norway. The victorious emigrants who occupied the southern provinces of Europe speedily lost their own forms of

* A. D. 476.

speech, which were broken down, together with those of the vanquished, into a jargon unfit for composition. But in Germany and Scandinavia, where the old language retained its purity, that species of song, which all we know of the state of manners in those districts at that time, and all we can gather from the analogies of history, prepare us to look for, continued to flourish. There, from the most distant era, which Latin* pens have described, the favourite attendants of chiefs and kings were those celebrated BARDS who preserved, in their traditionary strains, the memory of great events, the praises of the gods, the glory of warriors, the laws and customs of their countrymen. Entrusted, for the most part, like the Grecian heroic minstrelsy, to oral recitation, and seldom committed to writing, it was not until the propitious reign of Charlemagne that—in this respect also sharing the fortune of the eldest surviving Greek poems—these verses were at last collected, and, as he hoped, secured from further hazard. But, alas! not a fragment of his collection has survived the active persecution of his bigoted successor, or the slower ravages of time. The loss thus occasioned can hardly be too much lamented; since, though some original relics of the eighth century perhaps exist, we may be sure that the researches of Charlemagne and his learned assistants remounted to a far higher date, and accumulated a mass of valuable specimens. That, even at a very high date, the Teutonic poetry displayed considerable excellence of structure and expression, may be inferred from the formed and regular prose of Ulphilas, whose Gothic translation of the

* Tacitus, Lucan, Ammianus Marcellinus.

scriptures still evinces the state of the tongue in the three hundred and eightieth year after Christ. But of the general tone and tenor of that poetry we derive indications from other interesting documents. The NIBELUNGEN-LIED (*Lay of the Nibelungen*), and HELDEN BUCH (*Book of heroes*), especially the former, may be marked as the Homeric poems of Germany. The *Lay of the Nibelungen* is an epic of the most rich, bold, and natural character. Though recast, probably by Henry of Ofterdingen, about the close of the twelfth century, and transmitted to us in the altered form which he imposed upon it, yet through all interpolations and changes of diction, the original substance can be clearly discerned. The scene, laid partly on the Rhine, partly on the borders of Austria and Hungary, belongs to the age of Attila;* and the portraiture of those stormy days is drawn with too much truth and knowledge to allow of our fixing the date of the real author much lower than the next generation. It is a tale of impassioned love, of war and revelry, of joy and woe, of glory and fate, remarkable at once for the variety of its colouring and for the unity of its plan. If inferior in the development of its action, and the vividness of its representation, to the works of Homer, of what other epic production, of any country or era, must not the same be affirmed?

The *Book of heroes* seems to have been refashioned by the hands of the same Henry of Ofterdingen, already mentioned, and by those of his eminent contemporary, Wolfram of Eschenbach. Although made up of an assemblage, in four parts, of different

* A. D. 450.

knightly legends, the burden of the old national songs, it yet possesses a central point in the person of the principal hero, Dietrich of Bern, another name for the great Theodoric. The whole abounds in strokes of the imaginative and the wonderful, and speaks loudly for the vivacious and exhaustless fancy of the ancient bards. After exploring these monuments of their ability, it is impossible to be surprised at the honour in which they were held, or the rapture with which their hearers were affected. The sparkling eyes, the irrepressible tears, which are represented as attending their performances,* show not more plainly the sensibility of the audience than the magic of the strain.

Equally distinguished, and equally worthy of distinction, were the SCALDS of Scandinavia. The lives of these famous poets were as full of incident as their poetry. Ever in the train of princes and gallant adventurers, in war or peace, by sea and land, they chanted their rhymeless verse for the solace and encouragement of heroes. With the exception of a few hymns to the gods, their oldest songs or *Sagas* seem to have been all of an historical import. Such were the themes prescribed to them at those festive entertainments, at which the pleasures of the banquetting tribe were accounted incomplete without some poetical tribute to their own exploits, or to the fame of their ancestors. In the Icelandic EDDA, however, the richest monument of this species of composition, the theological element of their poetry, shadowed out in the most picturesque and fanciful legends, is pre-

* See in the historical remains of Priscus, his account of Attila's reception of the Roman ambassadors.—*Part I. p. 205. Niebuhr's edition of the Byzantine Writers.*

dominant. In the latter parts of that singular work, there are some traces of an acquaintance with classical mythology, and with the Christian doctrines: but in the earlier portion of it we find the unmixed spirit of the Teutonic creed; a spirit naturally fostered by the muse of Scandinavia, since in that region heathenism longest lingered, and most reluctantly gave way to Christianity. The conversion of its inhabitants was not fully achieved until the tenth century: the Edda appears to have received its present shape between the ninth, when the Norwegians, disgusted with the tyranny of Harold Fairhair, first established themselves in Iceland, and the thirteenth, during which Icelandic freedom expired. But in this instance, as in that of the poems before noticed, the substance of very ancient lays has evidently been preserved under some external alterations.

Such was the poetical state; that is, such, in one of the highest modes by which intellect reveals itself, was the intellectual state of Europe, down to the age of Charlemagne. While in the once famous seats of arts and arms scarcely a ray of native genius or courage was visible, the light of the human mind still burned in lands whose barbarism had furnished matter for many a sarcastic stroke of classical pens.

The character of CHARLEMAGNE,* with whatever vices it might be stained, had two rare and excellent qualities: in spite of a youth and manhood spent in warfare, plans for the encouragement of letters divided his mind with those of conquest and dominion; and his reverence for exact and recondite learning did not degenerate into a pedantic hatred of all that was in-

* A. D. 740—814.

digenous and popular. While he established schools, filled his court with men of erudition, and promoted the cultivation of science, he did not shut his eyes to the true though homely lustre of Teutonic genius. He gathered, as has been previously stated, partly from extant manuscripts, and partly from oral recitation, the songs of the primitive bards; and bestowed great pains upon the improvement of his vernacular dialect. The consequences of this patriotic and enlightened patronage extended, in the face of opposition, into succeeding reigns, and kept up the genuine literature of the middle ages. One portion, indeed, of the old poetry, the strictly mythological portion, had fallen, centuries before, together with the Runic characters and the superstitious rites in which they were employed, beneath the spread of Christianity; but the half-historical, heroic verse retained its charm and its popularity even after the epoch of Charlemagne. The people still delighted in tales of wood and wild, of blood and battle, of love and wassailing. These neither the rivalry of the monks, nor the ban of the church, were able to suppress in favour of moral rhapsodies and versions of Scripture. The gospel-translations of OTTFRIED* were not, we may believe, so often on contemporary lips as the grand triumphal hymn, pregnant with lyric fire, that commemorates the overthrow of the Normans by Louis the Third.†

A foreign writer, with praiseworthy liberality, has pronounced the merits of Charlemagne, great as they were, inferior to those of ALFRED.‡ That illustrious prince was himself a scholar of no mean attainments,

* A. D. 870.

† Author unknown. Date A. D. 881.

‡ Reigns, A. D. 871—901.

and an author, whose labours improved and enriched the Anglo-Saxon dialect ; one of the finest and purest forms of Teutonic speech. His animating example and fostering cares had the most beneficial influence on his contemporaries ; and but for the subsequent troubles of England, and the incessant terrors of Danish invasion, might have caused so ample a development of mental powers as would have created an early and complete English literature. Even amid the agitating events of those turbulent times which followed his death, the voice of song at least was not silenced. How much of epic inspiration, as well as of national pride, still lives in the Saxon poem on the victory of Athelstan !* By appealing to further evidence, and especially by turning once more to the materials furnished by the state of Iceland, and the rest of the Scandinavian territories, it would be easy to make out a pleasing picture of the genius of the middle ages at their close ; but the appearance of new languages, and the fresh dawn of intellect in other parts of Europe, now invite our attention to a wider and more fruitful field of observation.

We have already alluded to the confusion and debasement of language, produced by the torrent of immigration from the North, in those Southern countries over which it passed. Where the medium of thought was so corrupted, and while the virulence of the corruption endured, there could be no vernacular literature. But, force and activity of mind having been original attributes of the conquering race, and recollections of pristine glory still lingering among

* A. D. 938.

the conquered, it was to be expected that regularity and harmony of speech would ultimately reappear even out of the concussion of discordant elements. And thus, in the course of centuries, order in new and various shapes arose from previous confusion; the Latin and Teutonic tongues were blended together upon a principle of compromise; and hence proceeded all the chief dialects of Modern Europe. Over the South, from Portugal to Italy, the Latin element prevailed: but even where Teutonic was the basis and main ingredient; in the English, in the yet purer and more primitive German; there has been so considerable an infusion of Roman words, that these also might fairly be classed with the Romanic languages. Among those, however, to which that name is generally given; the Provençal, the French, the Italian, the Spanish, and the Portuguese; the traces of a common origin, notwithstanding some curious diversities in the formation of vocables from the Latin stock, are much more deeply and indelibly marked. To these five, so closely related; and to the other two, which may be viewed apart from them, all that is prominent and precious in modern letters belong. The birth of some of these languages; of the Provençal, which having been formed at Arles during the reign of king Bozon,* preceded the rest in antiquity; and of the French, which took its rise in the court of William Long-sword,† son of the Norman duke Rollo, falls within the limits of the middle age: but it is not until the eleventh century that their progress becomes identified with the history of literature.

* A. D. 877—887.

† A. D. 917—943.

With the earliest years of this century causes began to unfold themselves, which altered the relations of society in Europe, and, as a necessary consequence, the tone of her literary productions. Hitherto circumstances had almost forbidden the development of more than the poetical faculty in certain popular forms. There had been no elegant repose ; no widely-diffused freedom ; no peaceful enjoyment of property : the independence and industry of the middle classes, which have since generated so much mental power, were things scarcely known : the chieftain, the vassal, and the slave, were the characters which stood out in the highest relief, and determined the aspect of civil life.

At last, through that tendency, so remarkable in human affairs, of enormous evils to work their own cure, the social chaos resolved itself into some appearances of order and tranquillity. Throughout the whole of the eleventh century this process was in operation ; and although Europe was then in a state of transition, whose results became more evident in the course of the next two hundred years, yet the very commencement of the great change is sufficiently marked to constitute a new era. It was then that the gradual abolition of personal slavery, hardly accomplished in three successive centuries, began. A third estate arose. The rights of cities, and the corporation-spirit, growing out of the necessity that drove men to combine for mutual defence, gave birth to a species of steady intercourse among them, which led to immediate improvements of language and idiom. Then also chivalry, strictly adhering to its original purpose, served to mitigate the oppressions of the nobles, and to soften and refine their manners.

From the date of the first crusade,* down to the close of the twelfth century, was the golden age of chivalry. The principal thrones of Europe were occupied by her foremost knights. The East formed a point of union for the ardent and adventurous natives of many different countries, whose courteous rivalry carried to a high pitch the profession of generous sentiments and the passion for brave deeds. The feeling of honour, which is the very soul of chivalry, was never more lively. And the crusades themselves, though intended by their original promoters to rivet the fetters of superstition and retard the progress of the human intellect, had to a great degree an opposite effect. By the passage of thousands of her sons through Greece into Asia and Egypt, amid the ancient seats of art and science and refinement, in which all traces of their former reign were not yet obliterated, the genius of Europe was roused. Men's minds received a fresh and powerful impulse. They were led to compare, to reflect, to aspire, and to imitate.

In order to trace clearly the progress of modern letters from the epoch which we have fixed, and to show at once their general scope and spirit at different times, and the height of excellence to which certain great minds attained, it will be proper now to distribute our subject according to three remarkable periods. The first will comprehend the course of the new literature from its dawn to the Reformation of religion ; the second will extend from the Reformation to the end of the seventeenth century, or the reign of Queen Anne in England ; and the third period,

* A. D. 1095.

commencing with the reign of that princess, will carry us down to the present day.

I. Of the first of these periods, or of a large portion of it at least, very opposite impressions may be given, as prejudice and the love of theory, or fairness and the love of truth, are allowed to sway the mind of the critic. It will be painted in sad and sombre tints by those who choose, with Robertson,* confounding the limits of literature and science, to fasten their eyes upon the scholastic theology, or the metaphysics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; and to inveigh against the speculative refinements of the one, or the frivolous subtleties of the other. But it seems monstrous to confine attention to works of this sort, composed in degenerate Latin, while, at the same points of time, the natural and healthy produce of genius, excited by all the causes that have been above enumerated, and breathing the accents of vernacular dialects which had at last arisen, present a prospect equally real, and infinitely more pleasing to contemplate.

As of these dialects the Provençal was the earliest formed, so in the age with which we are now concerned, the Provençal poetry took precedence of all other kinds of literature. It was the most rapidly developed, and the most widely diffused; spreading from the extremities of Spain to those of Italy, and serving for a model to the poets of other lands and tongues, even to those of the North. The language in which it was composed was spoken in all the provinces of France south of the Loire; a region that had been subject to several of the successors of Charle-

* See his *View of the progress of Society in Europe, &c.*, Sect. I.

magne, but had, in 879, gained the rank of an independent kingdom, and enjoyed its independence for more than two hundred years. At the close of that period, Provence was joined to a portion of Spain, under the sovereignty of Raymond Berenger,* count of Barcelona: but as the Catalonian dialect was closely allied to the Provençal, this junction, instead of distracting the minds of the united people, only impressed them with a fresh movement. The Catalonians had exercised their faculties in the pursuits of commerce and of war; they had enlarged their knowledge and polished their taste by familiar intercourse with the Moors of the peninsula. The Arabian poets, and writers of history, who were then to be found at every petty Spanish court, were brought by the reign of Berenger into contact with his French subjects. And thus from East and West at once, partly through means of the Crusaders, partly through means of the Moors, the fictions and modes of composition, belonging to Arabia and Persia, began to influence the progress of letters in Europe. Here, therefore, seems the proper place to say a few words concerning both these branches of literature.

Until the middle of the seventh century after Christ, the ARABIAN peninsula, cut off by its position from the rest of the world, and having few commercial relations with other countries, could boast of little intellectual culture. During those times of their ignorance, as the Arabs themselves have named the ages before Mahomet, there was, however, among them that species and degree of original power which irrepressibly breaks forth in song. And artless as

* A. D. 1092.

their poetry was ; made up of successive pictures in the order in which they might strike the imagination, with no heed of system or regular arrangement ; still those rude rhymes were so highly loved and valued by the people, that the great Impostor never felt sure of the triumph of his doctrines till the character of poet as well as prophet was conceded to him by contemporary criticism. About one hundred years before his appearance, means had been adopted to invest with more than their primitive pomp and circumstance the strains which, from an immemorial date, had formed the delight of his countrymen. Full of martial fire, they had long thrilled the bosoms of the desert tribes ; rich in amorous sentiment, which is not, like the former feeling, an uniform ingredient of early and unpolished poetry, they had long been dear to the natives of a burning climate ; long had they amused and recreated the weary pilgrims who thronged to the holy city of Mecca ; but the appointment of a set place for the competitions of the bards, and the custom of suspending the successful poems on the doors of the Caaba, cannot be traced further back than the beginning of the sixth century. The oldest productions of this class which have reached us have no claim to a higher antiquity.

Yet what an untainted freshness, what an union of strength and pastoral simplicity, such as we expect to be breathed from the soul of a warrior-shepherd, do these specimens of Eastern poetry exhibit ! True, there is a great sameness in their introductory parts, in the passages descriptive of scenery, and in the allusions to a circle of objects and ideas which circumstances made unavoidably narrow. But, with thus much of confessed uniformity, how striking a

variety is there in the characters of the different poets; from the mellowed wisdom of Zoheir,* from the fine struggle between passion and heroism in the bosom of Antara, to the tenderness of Lebid, or the ready guile that aids, without allaying, the impetuosity of Amriolkais! Their compositions may not belong to any regular division of the art, (unless the limits of lyric poetry be deemed wide enough to admit them), but who will deny the praise of beauty to that exquisite, however irregular, mixture of martial audacity, with elegiac sadness, and the richest glow of voluptuous colouring? The MOALLAKAT, as the seven extant pieces, made known to English readers by the versions of Sir William Jones, are named; and some of the more ancient verses in the HAMASAS,† or anthologies; force us to entertain no humble estimate of the powers of the Arabian lyre, before the epoch of the Prophet.

Then came the KORAN:‡ so far poetical in form, that the principle of rhyme is discernible in its several chapters; so far poetry in substance, that some passages of genuine sublimity appear amid much flatness and poverty of conception; and so far important in the history of Arabian letters, that when the scattered leaves were collected by Abubeker, the successor of Mahomet, and afterwards revised by the caliph Othman, in the thirtieth year of the Hegira, they fixed at once the classic language of the Arabs, and

* Zoheir about A. D. 531. Antara a little before that date. Lebid and Amriolkais contemporary with the earlier years of Mahomet.

† The dates of these collections, two in number, are A. D. 830, and A. D. 880, but several of the poems contained in them are older than the time of Mahomet.

‡ MAHOMET A. D. 570—632. The Koran published by Abubeker, A. D. 634, revised by Othman, A. D. 652.

became their standard in style as well as in religion. But though the work in itself possesses a certain degree of literary merit, the first effect of the new faith which it inculcated was to consume the love of art and science in a flame of fanatical enthusiasm. For one hundred and thirty years after the Hegira, the Arabs were intently occupied about schemes and feats of conquest; the fruits of which were a dominion stretching from the borders of Tartary and India to the coasts of the Atlantic. Little room was there for the love or the encouragement of letters amid the press of warlike plans and operations. At last, however, the Abassides were established in the caliphate,* and brought in their train the revival of learning and philosophy. Especially from the reign of AL-MA-MOUN† we must date the true glory of Bagdad. His court was more like some brilliant academy than the centre of a military empire. Then was the great day of translators, commentators, doctors, and professors. The zeal that adorned the throne spread through its dependencies; pervading and enlightening Egypt and Morocco, until it reached the very acme of its beneficent influence in Spain, where Cordova, Seville, and Granada contested the palm of merit. Then, too, though both the exact and the metaphysical sciences were studiously cultivated, poetry and rhetoric were not thrown into the shade. On the refinement of language, and on every other aid and appliance of these fascinating arts, the most unsparing pains were bestowed. An almost incalculable host of names might be cited to attest the richness of the Arabian literature, and above all of

* A. D. 750.

† A. D. 813—833.

the Spanish branch of it. As late as the fourteenth century it had not totally died away, but in the eleventh, the period most nearly connected with our present inquiry, its beauty and vigour were at the greatest height.

Though erring on the side of extravagance and subtlety, even the cultivated poetry of the Arabians is of a highly original vein. While they were taking lessons in science from the Grecian philosophy, the Greek poets as well as the Greek historians remained unknown or unprized by them. The praise of equal originality is, perhaps, not due to another department of their imaginative works ; those picturesque and brilliant tales, allied to poetry in some of its most winning attributes, one body of which, although accessible to the majority of European readers only in translation, still occupies a commanding place in literature. Yet, admitting that orientalists may have rightly derived much of this delightful collection from Persian or Indian sources, there can be no doubt that the Arabs were the great patrons and promoters of the branch of fiction to which it belongs. As soon as we hear at all of the natives of Arabia, we hear of the enthusiasm with which they were wont to practise or applaud the art of narration. From them that spirit was caught by the Crusaders, which infused itself, together with the spirit of Arabian poetry, into the compositions of the West, in the very dawn of modern letters, ages before an exact version of the principal legends had been published in Europe.

The genius of PERSIA, likewise, was brought by a direct, as well as by a circuitous channel, into contact with the European mind. In that country, during

the times of the Magi, there had flourished an ancient literature, some fragments of which survived their fall. The Magi themselves, with their rites and laws, were swept away by the Mahometan conquest,* when political considerations led to the suppression of their order: but, after a tedious interval, the creation of a new Persian dialect brought with it the reappearance of polite learning. In history, and still more eminently in poetry, successful efforts were made. So late as in the thirteenth century, the *Orchard* and the *Rose-garden* of SADI combined the mingled flowers of narrative, gnomic, and ethical song; so late as in the beginning of the fifteenth, sublime mysteries were couched by the lyric HAFIZ under the allegorical praises of love and wine. Here, however, as in the history of Arabian letters, the epoch of perfection nearly coincides with the dawn of the Provençal minstrelsy. At that era FERDUSI† poured forth a hundred and twenty thousand verses to the fame of his country's heroes, and deserved by their excellence to be styled the Persian Homer.

To look back on what we know or guess as to the old literature of Persia would serve the single purpose of demonstrating that its origin and growth were similar to those of Grecian poetry, as already described. But Ferdusi has a thousand claims on our attention. His bold epic diction; the beautiful fancy with which he idealized traditionary tales of kings and warriors; have been felt in their vivifying influence upon many European productions: and, if some corresponding notions, and some kindred superstitions already existed in the West, they took at

* A. D. 651.

† Died, A. D. 1020.

least a warmer colouring from the splendours of his oriental imagery.

Among the embellishments borrowed by Provençal poetry from the Arabs was rhyme, an ornament as essential to Arabian verse as alliteration was to that of the Northern tribes; and which its adopters strove to vary with the most sportive prodigality. From the same source, likewise, were derived many glowing maxims of chivalry, that great virtue of the gallant Moors; and many aspirations of romantic love. For in the *troubadours*, as in their Eastern masters, the traits of the amorous and of the martial character were blended. If strokes of satire and political allusions were allowed to mingle with some of their kinds of composition, still in all those kinds, their single lays and their amœbaean dialogues, their *sirventes* and their *tensons*, or whatever else they might be called, war and love were evermore the key-notes of the strain. By the appellation of *Courts of Love* were those assemblies known, in which the ardour of contending poets was inflamed by the presence of beauty and the hope of prizes from a female hand. Even this incitement, however, failed to call forth any production of surpassing merit. None rises high above the level of the multitudes around. It would be needless to number the piles of manuscripts, in which these are chiefly preserved; or to recount a long list of individual troubadours, though it would include a name so illustrious as that of the lion-hearted Richard, the hero of his age, and the idol of his poetical contemporaries. Suffice it to say that the Provençal style endured, in different quarters, from the time of William of Poitiers* to the union

* A. D. 1071—1126.

of Aragon and Castile,* without greatly adding to the vigour and tenderness displayed in its earliest specimens. The rage, perhaps, for joining the ranks of the troubadours, was too universal to favour the real progress of their art. Fashion rather than inspiration led too many to enroll themselves. Men rhymed because they heard the rhymes of others: they rhymed as a knightly accomplishment: and the best among them, when their natural vein was exhausted, were still compelled by rivalry to rhyme on. Moreover, the principal seat of this art, the southern portion of France, was torn to pieces, in the opening of the thirteenth century, by the Albigensian persecution.† At last Provence itself fell into the possession of the French crown. The northern dialect, technically distinguished as the language of *oui*,‡ drove the dialect of the south, or the language of *oc*, from its position on the field of literature.

The dialect of NORTHERN FRANCE had indeed, though sprung from the same sources as the Provençal, and distinguished from it only by a greater predominance of the Teutonic element, always resisted the sister language, and rejected, with intolerant disdain, those ameliorations which might have been derived from its more early and rapid culture. Till the middle of the twelfth century, the Walloons, or French of the north, made use of Latin alone in all works of taste or fancy. The Normans, however, as one result of their successful invasion,§ communicated somewhat of their own nerve and liveliness to

* A. D. 1479.

† A. D. 1209.

‡ From the form of the affirmative, equivalent to "yes," in that dialect. On the same principle, the Provençal was called the language of *oc*; the Italian that of *si*; the German that of *ya*.

§ Rollo recognised as duke of Normandy, A. D. 911.

the vernacular tongue of their new subjects : and in Normandy, or by natives of that province, the first well-known writings in the Walloon dialect were produced. The most remarkable of these was *BRUT OF ENGLAND*, a rhymed fable from ancient legends, which appeared in 1155. Then, under the reign of Philip Augustus,* a cluster of poets, from the Norman town of Bernay, and other places, charmed the Parisian court with the adventures of Alexander, the great Macedonian, metamorphosed into a cavalier. Royal and noble patronage soon summoned into existence a swarm of versifiers, who gradually ripened and improved the French language ; though its progress was not swift until the full restoration of classical learning in Europe. Lyric poetry claimed a share of their attention ; so that in their art, as well as in their name, the *trouvères* of the north were allied to the southern troubadours. But the epic tendency was triumphant. Mere songs and verses of gallantry were never so popular with those, whom the *trouvères* sought to please, as stories of enterprise, or merry tales, especially when grafted on some chosen stock of romance, or redolent of the land of the fairies.

This appetite for fables of adventure was further inflamed by the inoculation of the oriental taste. The very legends of the cloister were broken into rhyme ; though the monks were never able to impart to them that degree of naivetè and interest which some of the lay writings attained. No wonder that France, so deeply engaged in this kind of composition, gave an original form to one species of it, and became

* A. D. 1180—1223.

the cradle of the *romances of chivalry*! These first appeared in a poetical dress ; and, in their primary estate at least, were not devoid of the poetical essence. Bechada sounded the prelude to them, when in the year 1130 he sang the exploits of Godfrey and the glories of the earliest crusade. But king ARTHUR, the son of Pendragon, the rudiments of whose story are found in the above-mentioned poem of Brut ; the magician Merlin ; and the knights of the Round Table ; supplied the subjects of the first class of regular romances. The court of CHARLEMAGNE and his paladins, whose real history was so brilliant, amid the darkness of the middle age, that it readily afforded a nucleus for a host of fantastic additions, gave birth to another class, after the famous chronicle of *Turpin*, the parent of this second family, had been translated out of the Latin in which it was composed. The superior popularity of the former of these classes, and the chosen scenes of its adventures, indicate very plainly that though romantic lays were common enough in other provinces, and supernatural machinery might be borrowed from many sources, it was the Normans, who so powerfully influenced the early French literature, that were the immediate creators of this new world of regular poetry : and it matters little, for the fame of that noble race, whether their first attempts were made in England or in France. And, though much grossness and absurdity disfigure the best of their productions ; though there is no great variety, except of names, in the long chain of romantic fictions ; though not only do the fairies of the East mingle in the wild dance of incidents, but the most ludicrous distortions of Greek and Trojan story shock the classical reader of them ; still in their

pages there breathes the true Norman spirit; still daring knighthood and devoted gallantry are the two poles on which their whole system is made to turn.

From the date of *Tristan*, in 1190, the first that was written in prose, a large portion of these works was withdrawn from the domain of verse. But the poetical form was again adopted for a celebrated composition, allied to them in name rather than in substance, which bespeaks the originality of French genius, and has been the model of some illustrious imitators. William of Lorris, who died in 1260, began the ROMANCE OF THE ROSE: John of Meun, about fifty years later, completed it. This allegorical dream on the art of love, distinguished from the Visions found in some classic authors by the nature of its plot, and from the chivalry-romances by its shape and double meaning, was received with acclamations of surprise and pleasure. The fact that it was so greeted has been often advanced as a proof of the extreme bad taste of the times; yet it cannot be denied that amid all the extravagance, indelicacy, and tediousness of its twenty thousand lines, there are both great powers of luxuriant description, and traces of that wit, that invention, and that practical philosophy, which, in combination with the talent of narrating, very early delighted the French people, and constitute the very soul of their literature.

In another great branch of poetry, the Normans set the example to modern Europe. In their hands, either on French or English ground, the art of narration once more warmed into the DRAMA. Before the close of the thirteenth century, tales in dialogue, grounded upon sacred subjects, were produced by pilgrims returning from the Holy Land. In 1313,

Philip the Fair of France gave an entertainment, at which dramatised facts and parables of Scripture were mixed with satirical farces. In 1380, regular companies were organized to conduct both these species of exhibition. It is curious to perceive, in some of these steps, a near resemblance to the rise of ancient tragedy and comedy. The character of those histories, which furnished its plots, rather than anything in the process of its growth, gave a new character to the romantic drama, when compared with that of the classical ages.

Meanwhile composition in prose, though the faults that marred a vast proportion of their metrical works were even exceeded by its imperfections, was not abandoned by the French. About the year 1309 JOINVILLE, by his biography of St. Louis, became the founder of a historical school, in which the France of later days has numbered many of her most eminent wits. Though deserving praise for his fulness and fidelity, his style is unformed, verbose, and intricate: but, almost a century later, the enthusiastic FROISSART,* conceiving his plan in youth, and devoting his life to its execution, crowned the other merits of his captivating chronicles with a fluency and a power of painting that reveal, in spite of frequent carelessness, the hand of a master.

During the hundred years that lie between Froissart and the end of our first modern period, French literature was not entirely stagnant. We may mark the venomous satires of CORBEUIL,† and the agreeable memoirs of PHILIP DE COMINES.‡ But mighty causes were now coming into operation, the heralds

* Died A. D. 1400.

† A. D. 1431—1461.

‡ A. D. 1446—1509.

of a new era, and whose effects on the progress of French letters will hereafter, in their turn, be pointed out. At present we must go back to take up the literary annals of other countries.

With the literature of northern France that of ITALY has certain links of consanguinity. The *romance of the rose*, immeasurably inferior as it is, gave the hint for the transcendent vision of Dante. Boccaccio drew upon the *fabliaux* of the trouvères for a considerable part of his materials. Ariosto, and other authors of the chivalrous epics, echoed while they improved the tone of the chivalrous romances. But the first literary connection of the two nations arose, more naturally, between the Italians and the poets of Provence.

Toward the conclusion of the middle age, and while the Romanic language in Italy was still raw and fashionless, some legendary tales appear to have been attempted in that dialect; but it had, as yet, no fitness for regular composition. Subsequently, the constant intercourse of the Italians with the south of France made them aware of the graces of the Provençal tongue, and masters of its use. Thus put in possession of an already formed medium of thought, they strove to emulate the Provençal poetry. The troubadours welcomed and encouraged the ardour of their disciples. For two centuries,* the style which they had created continued popular in its new territory; and the reputation of the Mantuan SORDELLO;† of him whom Dante honoured, and in whom he figures Virgil as proud to own a fellow-citizen and successor; illustrates the brightest point of that period.

* From A. D. 1100—1300.

† A. D. 1200.

By degrees the proper Italian, both in Sicily, where songs were written in it on the Arabian and Provençal model, and in Italy itself, was gaining form and flexibility. By the very fermentations of its political state, by the increase of trade and manufactures, by the growing prosperity which these engendered, the Italian people began to feel its own strength and to seek a vent for it in fresh directions. The voice of a few poets was heard in the accents of their country: even prose was here and there essayed. It seemed possible that the scattered powers and harmonies of the language might be condensed, in process of time, into true force and rhythm; when at once, a single individual, borne up by the consciousness of irresistible genius,

“At one slight bound high over-leap'd all bound,”

and raised his native tongue to an eminence unapproached by any contemporary form of speech. DANTE* produced the first great work of modern literature; and instantly made classical the mingled nerve and melody of the Tuscan dialect.

A portion of the multifarious studies, whose fruits are manifested in the various and astonishing knowledge of this mighty poet, was prosecuted at Paris; and there he became acquainted with the sort of mould in which the allegorizing spirit of his age might be embodied. But the hints as to externals, there or elsewhere acquired by him; the tone of elevation and true art, with which his knowledge of the Latin ancients endowed him; the deep tinge of scriptural sentiment that imbued his soul, breaking

* A. D. 1265—1321.

out in more than the typical features of his poem; all these things, allowing them their utmost influence, still leave him perfectly original. The *Divine Comedy* is worthy of that strange and compound title, derived from the author's modesty on the one hand and the admiration of his countrymen on the other; since, though not dramatic, in the common sense of the word, it is equally foreign to the rest of the regular divisions of poesy, and defies us to class as well as to imitate it. It is not a mere vision: it is not a mere allegory. The actual, the visionary, and the symbolical, are blent into an unparalleled alliance. Who, indeed, shall endeavour to define and class an hundred cantos of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, that give shape and local habitation to the unseen, and soar above every other monument of human ingenuity in the horrors and the splendours they unfold? Who shall reduce to one category that amazing mixture of high and low, of tragical and ludicrous, of touching and terrific, of the love lighted up in the breast of Dante by his immortalized Beatrix, and the madness that was all his own? What a sensation must have been caused, in those days, by his learning; by his religious feeling, meriting to be so termed, when it is obliquely revealed, though too apt, in its more direct assertion, to run into fierce fanaticism; by his audacious satire; by his stern partisanship, wielding infernal fires for the punishment of political enemies; by the lurid grandeur of a style, whose light and darkness were equally exciting! The fourteenth century, at the opening of which the *Divine comedy* was written, had not ended before academical lectures were instituted for its elucidation; and Boccacio himself did not disdain

to be so employed. Hence, though Dante had no genuine followers in poetry; though he did not remain at all times the especial favourite of the Italians, the impression he made upon their language has been profound and lasting.

Dante burst upon the world with the suddenness and the pomp of a volcano. In the bosom of PETRARCH* burned a gentler flame. He caught and continued, in his own tongue, the spirit of the love-poets of Provence; but with a far higher genius, which has cast an undying halo round the memory of Laura and the fountain of Vaucluse. He has all the tenderness of the troubadours, dashed indeed with much of their affectation, yet more intellectually conceived and uttered with more skill in composition. To the Italian language, even after the muse of Dante, he was a signal benefactor. His soft and delicious harmonies gave it a more pure and consistent polish; the polish of Cicero and Virgil, chosen objects of his worship; the polish of those classical ancients, whom he first actively awakened from the sleep of ages, with an enthusiasm for every thing beautiful and noble in antiquity, which he laboured to diffuse over Europe, and whose effects were speedily felt in his native land. How must that enthusiasm have filled and controlled the mind of Petrarch, when it caused him to blush for his Italian poetry, and to rest his pretensions to renown upon a Latin epic! But, though the university of Paris and the senate of Rome crowned him for his *Africa*, it is the vernacular verse, which he despised, that has won him a crown

* A. D. 1304—1374.

from posterity. The one is known only for the sake of Petrarch: Petrarch himself is known and honoured for the other.

We cannot marvel that the greatness of two such poets as Dante and Petrarch overshadowed the souls of men, and oppressed the vigour of Italian song for more than one generation. Dante was too lofty to be the founder of a school. Not less few than vain were the attempts to follow him. Petrarch, though even those who, with the candid and elegant Sismondi,* most severely condemn his conceits and his cold abstractions, will confess that the perfections of his style are as hard to equal as Dante's sublimity seemed to present an easier standard. Hence it became the universal rage to imitate the lover of Laura. His sonnets fixed a new shape of lyric poetry: fatally, perhaps, for the lyric genius of his country. Originality shrunk away from the constrained thoughts and vapid iterations of the sonnetteers. For a season, too, it was kept down by a resuscitated zeal for the classical writers. Much intellectual power was wasted on imitative endeavours in Latin composition.

In the age of Petrarch, Italian prose began almost to rival the graces of his poetry. A few previous efforts had been made; a few tales had been translated from the French trouvères. Boccaccio† applied his shining talents to the same task, and in the *Decameron* furnished an example of purity and harmony, of a choice and richness of expression, which showed that the language he cultivated was now fit

* De la littérature du Midi de l'Europe.

† A. D. 1313—1375.

for the treatment of any topic ; and which, among other consequences, threw into the shade his own poems, though fraught with the epic vein, and memorable for the invention of a stanza that was afterwards adopted in all the heroic verse of Italy, Portugal, and Spain. The criticism of later times detects faults, besides those which regard morality, in this celebrated work ; some prolixity of narration, and some careless verbosity ; but its general liveliness and elegance are worthy of the friend of Petrarch.

Among the imitators of BOCCACCIO, SACCHETTI, who grounded his novels upon real events, and who brings us down to the year 1400, comes nearest to the Tuscan beauties of his model. We can do no more than glance at some productions of a more serious kind. The political condition of Italy, when it had once been broken up into a number of separate states, gave all classes an interest in public affairs ; bestowed the spirit of statesmen on her antiquaries and her men of learning ; and made history an object of high concern. So early as the year 1268 SPINELLI composed annals of Naples in the Neapolitan dialect. Similar works appeared in various places. Even Petrarch deigned to employ Italian prose in a brief account of popes and emperors. Unfortunately, in spite of this beginning, historical writers soon betook themselves to the use of Latin, and maintained it until the commencement of the sixteenth century. The revival of classical literature in Italy, which has been already noticed, preceded its resurrection in other countries. Her opulence and liberality attracted the teachers of ancient letters : the munificence of her great men, her Viscontis, her Sforzas, and those princely merchants of the Medicean family,

who discovered how alone wealth could minister to real glory, nursed the flame which these teachers kindled. Manifold and precious were the ultimate results of this sacred zeal; but its immediate effect, no doubt, was to retard the progress of modern Italian literature. As soon, however, as the right application of classical knowledge, so inestimable when properly directed, was clearly discerned, the enlightened taste of Italy returned, with fresh appetite, to the culture of its own tongue. The fame of *Æneas Sylvius** and other masters of good Latinity is merged in that of Lorenzo de Medici,† the restorer of Italian song; of his favourite Politien,‡ who struck, though with a desultory hand, bold notes of both heroic and dramatic poetry; of Pulci§ and the more eminent Boiardo,|| who with all their deficiencies of genius or of style, led the way, in Italy, to that renewal of the old chivalric romance, which we shall presently find productive of memorable excellence in the great poets of our next period.

The kindred language of SPAIN was quickened into life sooner than that of Italy. From the termination of the ninth century, the active and incessant struggles of the Spanish Christians against the Moors, as well as a contact, which they could not avoid, with Arabian civilization, began to elicit sparks of intellectual energy. Little need be said of the poems in the Limosinic or Catalonian dialect; though to compose or to improve them was the occupation of kings themselves;¶ though they formed

* Afterwards Pope Pius II. A. D. 1405—1464.

† A. D. 1448—1492.

‡ A. D. 1454—1494.

§ A. D. 1431—1487.

|| A. D. 1430—1494.

¶ As Alphonso II. 1660; Peter II. of Arragon, 1213; Peter III. of Arragon, 1285; John I. 1390.

the cherished amusement of the Spanish nobles ; and expired not until, in the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella,* that haughty class was humbled, and the bustle of traffic and business drowned the accents of chivalry and love. For the Limosinic dialect, through the union of southern Spain and France under the house of Berenger, was merged in the Provençal ; and its subsequent poetry constitutes a part of the Provençal literature. But, side by side with it, the pure old Castilian tongue was likewise rising into being. As victory inclined more and more to the Spanish arms, it rapidly grew into a vehicle adequate to express the pride and dignity of the prevailing people, and that enthusiasm for liberty which was long their finest characteristic. The Castilian strains were of a higher mood than either the Provençal or the Limosinic songs. While they gave a voice to amorous ecstasies, their chief function was the rehearsal of heroic deeds. Above all other relics of those remote times, the chronicle of the Cid, however barbarous in point of style and metre, must delight the antiquarian as the oldest epic in a Romanic language, the philosopher as a vivid and various picture of human nature. It is, probably, not less ancient than the eleventh century ; and it reveals all the soul of that chivalrous age. Without pretension, it is full of greatness ; without disdaining a mixture of comic description, it teems with high sentiment and marvellous exploits. And, though some of its materials were perhaps Arabic ; and much of its spirit is necessarily that both of Moors and Spaniards ; it is nevertheless a true national image of the Casti-

* A. D. 1479.

lian race. Profound was the impression made by this poem, and by its hero, upon the Spanish mind; still is heard among the household words of Spain the name of Don Rodrigo de Bivar.

Time rolled on: ALFONSO THE WISE,* chemist, astronomer, and poet, while he wrote some canticles in the Gallician dialect, lavished his chief care on the amelioration of that of Castile, and even tried to tune it to a philosophic key: but the Cid was not forgotten. That portion of his story, which is commemorated in the ancient epic, together with his previous and subsequent adventures, proved the parents of a numerous family of romantic ballads, all glowing with heroic ardour. This fact should be noted in its bearing upon the critical question as to the composition of the *Iliad*;† and gladly do we draw, from a work so Homeric in its best qualities, any argument honourable to the memory of Homer. It may be merely by accident that the great poem of the Cid, as it has reached us, is confined, like the *Iliad*, to a brilliant segment of its hero's history; but it is of infinite moment to observe how much its being the exact reverse of a compilation out of shorter separate lays makes against the theory that the *Iliad* was so compiled.

The literature of Spain, throughout the thirteenth century, has nothing worth recording except its ballads. In prose, the symptoms of rusticity were not mitigated until the next age began. Alfonso the wise reaped no good fruits from his endeavours to promote historical composition. But the prince JUAN MANUEL, who died in 1362, exhibits some

* A. D. 1221—1284.

† See Part I. pp. 16—22.

grace in the forty-nine novels of which his *Count Lucanor* consists. LOPEZ DE AYALA* translated Livy into Castilian ; and essayed, without much success, to imitate him in his own chronicles. FERNANDO DE PULGAR, eighty years afterwards, was first distinguished by a more ripe and manly method of writing Spanish history ; but in the province of fiction, a contemporary of Juan Manuel, named VASCO LOBEIRA,† produced a powerful sensation by four books of *Amadis de Gaul*. Whether or not the germ of this renowned romance, on which even Cervantes has mercy,‡ were borrowed from France, there is no doubt of the greedy acceptance it met with from all ranks of Spaniards, and its instantaneous effect upon their taste. The spirit of those French works, with which, whatever its precise origin, it must certainly be classed, spread on all sides. Even the verse-romances of Spain became more chivalrous, more inventive, more fanciful than ever.

Thus proceeded the course of Spanish literature, mainly directed in one channel, as being animated and controlled by a forcible unvarying national character, to the end of the fifteenth century. Its tone was that of chivalry, until chivalry itself was no more. The feeble and troubled reign of John II.,§ during which the Castilian power seemed utterly sunk, was not without poetry. Honour, pride, and gallantry still burned in verse. These attributes combine even with the erudition of Lope de Mendoza and the pedantry of Juan de Mena.|| But as another epoch drew near, new species of poetical composition

* A. D. 1332—1407.

† A. D. 1325.

‡ Don Quixote, Book I. c. 6.

§ A. D. 1407—1454.

|| Lope de Mendoza, A. D. 1398—1458 ; Juan de Mena, A. D. 1412—1456.

began to predominate ; the lyric, in which the warm passions of the Spanish heart were damped by a fondness for conceits ; the allegorical, in which Dante was ineffectually imitated. Even the rudiments of the drama, religious, pastoral, and satiric, showed themselves, and were marked by sundry traits of original thought and talent. None of these branches yet rivalled the excellence of the romantic ballads : but in some the way was paved for future triumphs.

GERMANY shared in the general movement of the European mind at the dawn of the modern era. No country more warmly embraced the institution of knighthood ; in none was the passion for crusading more vivacious. Thus the Germans were brought into an ennobling fellowship with other nations ; their perception of the grand and the beautiful in art or nature was sharpened ; their very climate, improved by the removal of forests and morasses and the introduction of new modes of cultivation, poured a mellowing sunshine into the souls of men ; and their princes and chiefs, charmed with lessons they had learned abroad, promoted the acquisition of foreign graces in mental as well as physical culture. The example of the Provençal troubadours was not lost upon their north-eastern neighbours. Yet the Germans, while they took from them the mould of their love-poetry, did not cease to manifest, in its substance, proofs of that independence, for which the Teutonic muse had previously been famous. With regard to the outward garb of song, their metres were immediately matured to a degree of harmony that stills pleases the ear ; but, notwithstanding a certain enlargement of their vocabulary out of that of their masters, the first change wrought upon their

language was little else than one of dialect. Hitherto, from the reign of Charlemagne, the Frankish form of the German tongue had been most cherished. The poetical panegyric on Hanno, Archbishop of Cologne; a curious medley, which carries us, in forty-nine strophes, from the creation down to the death of that prelate in 1075, is written in Frankish. But when a Swabian dynasty, the house of Hohenstaufen, mounted the Imperial throne, their native dialect, more softened and refined than the Frankish, took precedence of it in courts and literature. From 1138, the date of the accession of Conrad the third, to about the year 1346, was the age of the Swabian MINNESINGERS. Three hundred of that tuneful band are known to us. Emperors and kings, dukes and counts, knights and barons, were among the foremost to compete in song. Poetical tournaments were held in lists crowded with the best blood of Germany. They chanted the praises of wine: they gave vent to all the dreams and longings of untamed fancy: they told of the pains and joys, the sighs and smiles of love, with a truth and tenderness that fitly baptized them with the very name of the passion* so portrayed. Not that other themes were entirely overlooked by the Minnesingers. Fables and spiritual hymns, heroic and didactic poetry, were occasionally produced by them. HENRY OF VALDECK,† after the precedent of an old French work, wrote a half-version, half-paraphrase, of the *Æneid*; taking care to embellish Virgil with romantic episodes in a taste somewhat different from that of his original. The *trouvères*, in addition to the *troubadours*, became

* *Minne* signifies love in German.

† A. D. 1170—1207.

favourite models ; and the Round Table, the Paladins, the Trojan war, and the deeds of Alexander the Great, made their appearance in German verse.

But the Minnesingers always shone most in their erotic poetry. Tender and thrilling to the last, it would hardly have died of mere exhaustion, from constantly dwelling on one fertile topic, had not political changes altered the aspect of Germany. The death of Frederick II., in 1250, was followed by twenty-three years of confusion, and by a melancholy depravation of the character of the German nobles. No more crusades, no more chivalry, no more delight in minstrelsy, dignified their order. Feudal violence prevailed on every side : all intercourse with foreign poets was abandoned : the knight sank into the military robber : Swabia, once the seat of taste and happiness, fell into decay. And, though Rudolph of Habsburg* repressed violence with a strenuous arm, neither this able monarch, nor his immediate successors, had leisure to patronise the peaceful arts. The promulgation of the Golden Bull, in 1356, bestowed on Germany a settled constitution ; but by that time the inclination to romance had vanished ; and, since the gentle contests of poetry were prized no more, and sterner realities or other pleasures had driven the art away from palaces and castles, it is rather surprising that, amid so many discouragements, a few Minnesingers should have lingered on so long, than that their career should then have closed for ever.

The MEISTERSANGERS were their degenerate successors. Never so faintly, as when struck by them,

* A. D. 1273.

sounded the harp of Germany. They sang to it, moreover, in a tongue that was now grievously corrupted. Even the love-poets had incorporated with the German language a gradually-increasing number of Provençal, French, and Latin words. After their decline, both the adoption of foreign phraseology became more habitual, and the rising demands of the philosopher, the lawyer and the mystic, for a fresh coinage of terms, while they held out the prospect of a rich and teeming future for the German tongue, gave birth in the meanwhile to an uncouth jargon, ill adapted for either poetry or prose. The first of these, falling entirely into plebeian hands, and putting on a trade-like exterior, became in very truth a craft and not an inspiration. The *Meistersängers* congregated in towns, such as Mayence, Nuremberg, and Strasburg: they had their corporate statutes, meetings, ceremonies, and privileges; their thirty-two prohibitory articles; their choice of scriptural, satirical, pastoral, romantic, amatory, and even dramatic subjects. Rosenplut,* an heraldic painter, the Thespis of the German stage, belonged to their society; but its most renowned member, at a later period, was JOHN SACHS,† a shoemaker, the author of upwards of six thousand pieces; whose tediousness and insipidity, in spite of Schlegel's extravagant praise of them, serve only to verify an ancient proverb.

The erection of universities, at Heidelberg, Prague, Vienna, Erfurt, Würzburg, Leipsic, in rapid succession,‡ did nothing to ameliorate the German taste. Their energies were expended upon empty whims,

* A. D. 1450.

† Born A. D. 1494.

‡ Heidelberg, A. D. 1346. Prague, 1348. Vienna, 1388. Erfurt, 1392. Würzburg, 1403. Leipsic, 1409.

unmeaning words, and frivolous distinctions. If some tokens of a better spirit were discernible, it was in but a single department of letters, and through means of one or two individuals, who soared above the general standard. Hugh of Trymberg, about the year 1300, and Boner, nearly fifty years after him, by their moral satires and their fables, prepared the way for REYNARD THE FOX,* a specimen of the comic epos, which proved at last that wit, humour, shrewdness, and invention, were not extinct in Germany. Whether Henry of Alkmar, or Nicolaus Baumann were the writer of this popular poem; and whether the first outline of its plan belong to the Dutch or to the Germans, there is no question as to the skill and boldness with which the author, in the Friseland dialect, and in rhymes succinct and unconstrained, converts the kingdom of beasts, who speak and act like men, into an allegorical satire upon the vices of the high and low, the wiles of courtiers, the excesses of the clergy, and the whole "form and pressure" of his times. Allegory, though managed with less ease, and through the personification of abstract qualities, reigns likewise in the *Theuerdank* of Melchior Pfinszing;† but the hero and patron of that poet, MAXIMILIAN I.,‡ who was himself an author, and who once more exhibited the spectacle of learning and zeal for its advancement in union with imperial rank, deserves better than his eulogist to be named as standing on the border between two epochs.

German prose, which has always lagged in the rear of German poetry, was naturally more tardy in its first growth. Frederick II., and subsequently

* A. D. 1470.

† A. D. 1418 – 1535.

‡ Emperor A. D. 1493 – 1519.

Rudolph of Habsburg, gave it as much sanction as could be derived from its use in public documents. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries witnessed some feeble attempts in history: Tauler, a Dominican of Strassburg, who died there in 1361, preached sermons not destitute of eloquence: but ALBERT DURER,* so distinguished in the practice of art, was also, by his writings on its theory, the real founder of prose composition in his country. And the mention of this eminent person again conducts us to the age and to the court of Maximilian.

The three divisions of the BRITISH ISLES; England, whose language, drawing without scruple from the resources of other tongues, and transcending all of modern date in force and variety, has established itself as supreme throughout a great empire; Scotland, which though labouring under many disadvantages, and never able to compete with its more fortunate sister in some branches of learning, has yet matched her proudest names in intellectual strength and enterprise; Ireland, renowned during the middle age for scholastic eminence, and amid the miseries and distractions of her more recent annals, shining at intervals with genius of so bright a ray, that it needed not the contrast of surrounding darkness to augment its brilliancy; these are the regions that furnish a candid inquirer the most valid reasons for doubting whether the lustre of ancient Greece itself has not been equalled in later times. In ENGLAND, it is true, the early promise of the Saxon literature was blighted. Following in the train of other adverse circumstances, the Norman conquest was sufficient to keep down,

* A. D. 1471—1527.

for upwards of two hundred years, the most genial element of our tongue. From William's invasion to the death of Edward I.,* Norman French was the language of the court, of law, and, to a great extent, of composition: Latin held its place with churchmen and chroniclers: Anglo-Saxon was cherished chiefly by the people. But in the course of Edward's reign, the popular branch of the English constitution put on its outline; and the weight acquired by cities gave consideration to the form of speech employed by their inhabitants. So were ushered in the best glories of the age of Edward III., and the parliamentary recognition of the English tongue as that of legislation. Up to that period England had received as large an addition to her vocabulary as the familiar intercourse of the Normans with her previous population could confer; and the dissemination of the romantic poetry had incited her minstrels to translate or imitate, in their own idiom, the models supplied through the same channel. Not to dwell, however, on their ballads; nor on the rhymed histories of Robert of Gloucester,† of Robert de Brunne,‡ or of the spirited Minot; § nor on the humorous but obscure *vision of Pierce Plowman*; || we ascribe in England, as in modern Italy, the rise of genuine poetry to the prodigious talents of one man. Impelled by the instinct of a poetical mind, instructed by much study, inflamed by the credit of the Italian masters, and perhaps, in his travels, by personal communication with Petrarch, CHAUCER ¶ permitted not the cares of public life, in which he was actively engaged, to

* That is from A. D. 1066, to A. D. 1307.

† A. D. 1280.

‡ A. D. 1303.

§ A. D. 1352.

|| By Longland; A. D. 1362.

¶ A. D. 1328—1406.

divert him from the lofty task of enriching his native language with glowing pictures of a world he knew under all its phases, and which he idealized, in so far as the principles of his art required, only by combining and concentrating things that had a literal existence of themselves. Chaucer borrowed profusely; words, forms, metres, and materials; the stock and instruments of poetry. He was a man of business, and aware of the good of trading with the capital of others. But that practical tendency which made him shun any waste of the inventive faculty, what a command did it not also give him over the realities of life and nature! He musters, he applies them, with Homeric familiarity and freedom. Nay, had their plan been statelier, and their rhythm more sounding, how nearly would his poems have approached even the Homeric miracles! Does any one suppose that his turn for light satire and humorous description distinguishes Chaucer from Homer? Let the portraits of Thersites, Melanthius, Irus, be compared with many passages in the *Canterbury Tales*, and that impression will vanish away.

Like Homer, too, Chaucer maintains a solitary grandeur. The grave and moral Gower* was, indeed, his contemporary: the versatile, diffuse, perspicuous, but languid Lydgate† came soon after him. They did something for the enlargement and refinement of the English language; but no one would range them with Chaucer, the poet of all ages and the landmark of his own. Nor had anything yet appeared in English prose, worthy to divide our admiration with this extraordinary writer. The travels

* A. D. 1320—1402.

† A. D. 1440.

of Mandeville,* the bible version and theological treatises of Wickliffe,† yielded, however, certain prognostics of what might afterwards be done. But from the outbreking of the war between the roses‡ to the accession of the House of Tudor, there occurs a dreary interval of civil confusion, and an eclipse of literature, that was feebly broken by the translations and compilations of Caxton;§ though, by the introduction of printing into England, he made her acquainted with one of those mighty influences which were to breathe new life into a succeeding age.

The early literary records of SCOTLAND are not so barren as its long turbulent state might lead us to fear. In the thirteenth century lived Thomas of Ercildoune, whose poetical talents obtained for him the title of the Rymer, whether he were, or were not, author of *Sir Tristram*: and, before the end of the fourteenth, the Scottish dialect, originally related to the Anglo-Saxon, and improved by direct communication with the north of England, was able to sustain the heroic theme of BARBOUR.|| About a hundred years later, there was more difference, in some respects, between the two dialects; though the intervening time was adorned by Harry the minstrel, James I., the picturesque Dunbar, and Gawin Douglas,¶ the translator of Virgil's *Æneid*. Of DUNBAR, Sir Walter Scott asserts, that "he has been justly raised to a level with Chaucer by every judge of poetry, to whom his obsolete language has not rendered him unintelligible:" and were it not for an excess of sameness and of mannerism in the

* Died 1372.

† A. D. 1324—1384.

‡ A. D. 1455.

§ A. D. 1471.

|| Author of *The Bruce*: A. D. 1326—1396.

¶ James I. A. D. 1395—1436: Dunbar, 1465—1530; Douglas, 1475—1522.

short poems he has left behind him, we might subscribe to this high eulogium. But James I. merits no less attention; as one whose just views of policy, and labours in the cause of good government, were not inferior to his learning and literary abilities. During his boyhood the University of St. Andrews was founded; in the time of his successor that of Glasgow followed; and, in the reign of James IV., a monarch more fortunate in arts than in arms, there was erected, at Aberdeen,* a third of those institutions, to which the whole population of Scotland is so deeply indebted. Even in their infancy "the labours of these learned seminaries were not in vain:"† they have continued, in every succeeding age, to do more good, and gain more honours, in proportion to their means, than any similar institutions: and, should the attempts of some to change their system ultimately prove as harmless as those of others to decry it, they may still flourish long, without diminution of their usefulness or fame.

It is conjectured, not improbably, by a recent historian of IRELAND,‡ that, in the brilliant times of her scholastic greatness, from the mission of St. Patrick § to the ninth century, the Fileas or Bards of that island, roused by her growing intercourse with the rest of Europe, must have made a simultaneous progress in their vernacular literature. But their literature is now one of memories and fragments; more fitted to kindle the fine fancy of their legitimate descendant, than to arrest our onward march. As

* St. Andrews, A. D. 1412; Glasgow, 1450; Aberdeen, 1494.

† History of Scotland, by Sir W. Scott, Vol. I. p. 333.

‡ History of Ireland, by Thomas Moore, Esq. Vol. I.

§ A. D. 422.

we draw near the date of the English invasion,* other fragments of the same class possess a stronger interest: since it seems to be ascertained that these, in conjunction, perhaps, with some remains of Gaelic song, supplied a basis for the splendid imposture of Macpherson. We turn, with a blush, from the many dismal consequences of English rule over the Irish people. It is painful to reflect that the Reformation itself, an event which falls within the opening of our second modern period, at first conduced only to the further depression of their country: but, ere that period ends, we shall have to mark the revival of letters and of science as one of the fruits of Protestant colonization in Ireland.

II. The REFORMATION of religion was not the only cause, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, which hurried on a general advance of the human mind and a full development of its resources. Before that great event, the rage of feudal contentions, after lingering too long in many countries, had begun to subside. In Spain and France the kingly power, raised to a commanding pitch, enabled its possessors to concentrate the energies of their subjects, and to act and war upon an ample theatre. The Papal influence was on the decline; and Rome had ceased to be the point of gravitation in European politics. In England civil broils had been at length exchanged for internal order: Germany, for a season, tasted the same blessing. The use of gunpowder gave to warfare a more regular and less savage character than heretofore; and cabinet intrigues, whose birth-place was Italy, exercised a sway commensur-

* A. D. 1170.

ate with that of arms. Now, too, the different states of Europe, not isolated as they were wont to be, were drawn by friendship or enmity into a number of close relations. And, though many convulsive shocks resulted from this approximation, as one country after another became the scene of military movements, yet, in spite of partial interruptions, the scholar and the merchant, the artist and the manufacturer, carried on their useful competition; travellers, voyagers, adventurers, continued to bring home with them accounts and specimens of all that nature or industry had done for man in the remotest parts of the earth; and knowledge and intelligence spread throughout the principal members of the European family.

For, this was likewise an era of maritime discoveries. Columbus crossed the Atlantic ocean.* Vasco de Gama opened a passage by sea to the East Indies.† The world was circumnavigated.‡ What an enlargement of science, what a change in mental cultivation, could not fail to flow from such magnificent achievements! New ideas streamed in from each newly visited region: the mistakes of former ignorance and credulity were unveiled; and thenceforth it was more easy to conquer prejudice and to dispel error.

Though of all the slowest and most reluctant to retire, even religious errors were dissipated and driven from their ground.§ Luther, Melanchthon, Zuingle, Calvin, and their disciples, collecting into a focus the straggling beams of truth, “lighted a candle,

* A. D. 1492.

† A. D. 1498.

‡ A. D. 1522.

§ The Reformation, A. D. 1517.

which, by God's help, shall never be extinguished."* Then was priestcraft overthrown by the Bible. Then were the means of education purified and multiplied. Then was reason invited to that alliance with faith, in which the peculiar provinces and the mutual dependence of both are best seen; and freedom of thought, once trained to wrestle in the Christian arena, gradually extended its dominion along all paths that can be travelled by the human understanding. From that day to this, unchecked by temporary difficulties, returning rapidly from every deviation, intellect has advanced with an erect port, and a firm step. Triumphant over the wiles of jesuistry and the flames of persecution, the genius of Protestantism has diffused countless benefits even throughout lands which adhere to the creed and rites of popery. Literature received from it an immediate and invigorating impulse. The vernacular dialects were cultivated, in some countries, with fresh animation, and took into their very substance the energy of those bold champions, who employed them in the defence or inculcation of their doctrines. The knowledge of the ancient tongues was prized and promoted as indispensably necessary for the critical interpretation of scripture.

The revival of ancient literature had been going on for more than a hundred years before the Reformation. Dante called Virgil his master; and we have already glanced at the learned labours and enthusiasm of Petrarch. Italy was the first to prove, by her appreciation of the resuscitated classics, that the germ of taste was not dead within her bosom. Nor did

* These are the memorable words of an English reformer.

any feeling of hereditary pride confine her within the pale of Roman letters. Towards the end of the fourteenth century, she listened once more to the dictates of Grecian teachers ; and when the fall of Constantinople, in 1453, forced crowds of enlightened Greeks to flee from the Turkish sword, it was Italy that welcomed the fugitives : there the generous wisdom of many rulers raised them to wealth and dignity ; and thence, in spite of opposition in England and elsewhere, the lessons they had given were ultimately imparted to the leading nations of Europe. The political greatness of the Italians did not endure long. By the discovery of new avenues for commerce, they lost their trade. War robbed them of independence. But they still grasped at the wreath of genius ; and we shall see that, for a time at least, they won and wore it. From Italy, Spain and Portugal caught the classic fire that glows in their best poetry and eloquence. Then came the Elizabethan age of England. More slowly dawned the brightest era of France. Germany, swayed to and fro by contending forces, last perceived the true route she ought to follow, and which has conducted her to so many triumphs. On all these countries, on all their great minds, the literature of Greece and Rome has acted with an operation more or less direct, but in the end always powerful and always beneficial. It has elevated the tone of history ; guided and enriched philosophy ; modulated the periods of oratory ; impeded the wings of song. And, unless wickedness and folly are destined to rebarbarise mankind, that literature must ever continue to stimulate and light them on their intellectual way ; by its difficulties, which exercise without wearying the mental powers ; by

its beauties, which have stood the brunt of time ; by its lofty independence of changeful fashions and local partialities, through which it forms a standard that all ages may regard with the same fondness, and all nations cherish with the same pride.

Nor should it be forgotten that, in conjunction with the treasures of the Greek and Latin tongues, those of the Hebrew language were soon brought, by the zeal of Reuchlin * and his followers, into the hands of the Christian world. Moreover now, exactly at the moment when it was most needed, appeared that great invention, without which these treasures, displayed perhaps for a brief interval, rather to dazzle than instruct, would have enjoyed no wide and lasting circulation. The art of PRINTING,† the most precious gift to man since that of an alphabet, obtained for genius the whole earth as an audience. We are accustomed to dwell on many of the grand results of this invention ; how it helped to break the chains of superstition, to found and fence the citadel of reason, to shake despotism, to render every future conspiracy against knowledge unavailing. Let us rank among its best fruits, that by it the stores of ancient learning were instantaneously diffused and made immortal.

And never, we repeat, from that moment of its complete awakening, has the universal mind of Europe relapsed into slumber. Look at her political condition from the Reformation to the commencement of the eighteenth century. Italy, indeed, fell. Spain did not long occupy that pinnacle on which she stood at the abdication of Charles V.‡ Her riches,

* A. D. 1455—1522.

† A. D. 1430—1440.

‡ A. D. 1555.

amassed for the most part by so much crime ; her insolence, that caused her to aspire to the mastery of the world ; her population ; her moral and intellectual might ; these were exhausted, humbled, prostrated, by the wars of the succeeding hundred years.* But in England, France, and Germany, those civil and religious strifes, which broke out anew, fierce and desolating as they were, produced no such final consequences. The tempest that passed over them seemed but to quicken the virtues of the soil. England established her Protestant faith ; secured her liberties ; became mistress of the sea. France forgot a bloody series of insurrections, massacres, and assassinations in the glories of Louis the Fourteenth.† Germany arose from the ashes of the thirty years war.‡ Look, in the next place, at the state of European letters for the same period. Though the resurrection of the classics was followed by a burst of pedantry ; by the fooleries of the Apuleian and Ciceronian sects ; by a serious design of some scholars to make Latin the common literary language ; yet these evils quickly vanished, leaving nothing but good behind. Though the din of senseless metaphysics resounded again ; though the mysteries of the cabbala, the absurdities of astrology, theosophy, and magic, engrossed some subtle intellects ; though there were faults of puritanism, faults of licentiousness, faults of affectation ; still was there evermore a host of high minds, that either bowed not down at all to the Baals of the day, or ennobled their idolatry by the splendours which they threw around it. Our review of separate nations, which we must now

* Down to the peace of Westphalia, A. D. 1648.

† A. D. 1643—1715.

‡ A. D. 1418—1648.

hasten to resume, will show that this assertion is in strict accordance with truth. It will show that, however the tide of genius might ebb or flow in particular countries, it never failed at once over the whole surface of Europe.

The long series of calamities under which ITALY groaned, from the irruption of the French in 1494 ; the defeats, the pillage, the misery of every kind, that she endured ; could not divert her from the arts and sciences, from the interpretation of the ancient classics, and the extension of her own literature. It is true that her governors and statesmen soon ceased to exercise a munificent and steady patronage of intellectual merit. Leo* the tenth sat only eight years on the papal throne ; and few after him were the pontiffs or princes, at Rome or Naples, Florence or Milan, Mantua or Ferrara, who loved learning and talent for their own sake, or found room for real generosity amid the cruelty, voluptuousness, and fraud, which filled their souls. Yet in spite of violence and wretchedness on all sides ; of contempt, persecution, and caprice in high places ; that mental activity which had been so wonderfully roused, held on its way rejoicing, and gained for the sixteenth century the glorious appellation of the *good age* of Italian letters. The French, Spanish, and German invaders, who gambled with the political fortunes of Italy as their stakes, were constrained to acknowledge her literary ascendancy. When the main body of Greek and Latin authors had been fairly published and devoutly studied, the Italians began again to exult in the beauties of their own tongue, and endea-

* A. D. 1513—1521.

voured to learn from those models which it, in common with the classical languages, could already supply, a consummate elegance of thought and style. These endeavours were not always happily directed. The multitude of academies or associations, which sprang up, with a variety of silly names and ceremonies, in the large towns, were productive of little but harm. It was no easy thing, no task for pedantic brotherhoods and dilettanti meetings, to effect a union between the spirit of the antique and the spirit of the romantic literature : the one simple, severe, and aiming to impress the mind by the entire symmetry of its creations ; the other, like its materials, rich, fantastic, various, and aiming to rouse our sensibilities by the perfection of details. Every scheme for reducing romantic subjects to the antique mould was sure to end in disappointment : the difficult problem was how to preserve for them their proper scope and figure ; yet crown and circle them with rays of ancient grandeur and beauty.

That problem was first solved by ARIOSTO.* In his hands the chivalrous epos of Pulci and Boiardo acquired unlooked for graces. The youthful extravagance of his prolific fancy was so far chastened by a classical taste, that while it wantons in eccentricity, it avoids the monstrous : and, without any semblance of the Homeric plan, a goodly portion of Homer's vein, especially of that which is apparent in the *Odyssey*, may be detected in the mingled sprightliness, tenderness, and fervour of the *Orlando Furioso*. There is not, however, the good faith of the thoroughly national and seemingly simple-hearted Greek. That

* A. D. 1474—1533.

could hardly be expected. A sincere belief in the marvellous, and anything like a basis in actual life for the ideal world of knight-errantry, were so long past, that there was something ludicrous in romantic actions and adventures, which must have instantly struck the eye of genius, and might justify a tone of irony in its mode of treating them. Yet with all his irrepressible feeling of the comic side of what he painted, there was too much of the true gentleman in Ariosto's inmost soul to let him be a stranger to high passions: hence that love of fealty and courage which stores his pages with at least one authentic and applicable lesson for mankind, as long as such qualities shall be held worthy of esteem. As to the heroes of his poem, Ariosto was content to take names and attributes from the *Orlando Inamorato* of count Boiardo; and, after his example, he went to Turpin's chronicle and the French trouvères for the scene, the age, and the prime materials of his plot. The fecundity of his own invention is evinced more by an accumulation of subordinate incidents, imagined and worked up with the most brilliant effect, than by any dramatic turn for diversifying character; and, though a French critic* may be right in tracing through this labyrinth one purpose and one regular action, the majority of readers will still delight to think that the very disorder of the poem has a peculiar charm. Such is the grace of Ariosto's negligence: such the brightness of those pictures that he makes flit in endless, frolicsome succession before our eyes: such the incomparable felicity of his versification and his diction! Happy for us that he rejected

* M. Ginguene.

Bembo's pedantic advice to write in Latin! Happy for us, too, that he was one "foredoom'd a father's soul to cross" by declining the profits of the legal profession! And yet, so completely does Ariosto wind into our affections, that, for his sake, we almost regret that preference for poetry, which threw him upon the sullen patronage of the Cardinal d'Este, and the niggardly favours of the duke of Ferrara.

Ariosto, as we have said, has the spirit of Homer's song without its form. In the dull attempt of Trissino* to revive, in Italian blank verse, the systematic epos of antiquity, we have the form without the spirit. But forgiven be the coldness, the heaviness, the stupid gravity of his *Italia Liberata*, if either the theme, which Trissino selected, or the earnest view he took of it, had aught to do with kindling heroic fire in the breast of TORQUATO TASSO!† Not the world of classic images and recollections alone, but the whole realms of poetry were engraven on the learned, imaginative, sublime, pathetic, polished, feeling mind of this wonderful man, this restorer and adorer of epic song in its noblest shape and nature. All critics seem to join in extolling his choice of a subject, from the brilliant annals of the first crusade; as displaying a magnificent platform for lofty scenes, and an unrivalled combination of the marvellous with the true. Nor can it be questioned that the Fall of Troy itself scarcely rouses so many associations, or commands such universal interest, as the Deliverance of Jerusalem. This subject, under Tasso's management, has all the unity of the Iliad; it has equal grandeur; and now, for the first time, there was diffused over

* A. D. 1478—1550.

† A. D. 1544—1595.

epic poetry a bright halo of love: not the physical passion, which the ancients commonly depicted; not the domestic feeling of Andromache and Hector; but that devout, that enthusiastic sentiment, of which the expression was, perhaps, exaggerated in the days of chivalry, but which was essentially the highest evidence of those pure ethics and liberal manners introduced among men by Christianity. With regard to the other merits of Tasso, it is amusing to contrast the opinions of his judges; the mockery of Voltaire, or the qualified praise of Schlegel, with the raptures of Sismondi. His machinery is childish and contemptible, says one; it is necessary, natural, and majestic, another replies: and assuredly, though Dante's grotesqueness is here and there not happily imitated by Tasso, there is something truly elevated in those conceptions of infernal power and eloquence, from which Milton deigned to receive a lesson. His episodes are beautiful, but they might have been placed, with equal propriety, in any other epic, says Schlegel. Schlegel might have said more justly that they are not only of matchless beauty, but most skillfully interlaced with the subject; that the magic of Armida, the charms of Clorinda, the love of Erminia (since these are specified by the critic) even where they do not conduce to the march of the plot, surround it with a lustre that makes the progress of the main action more conspicuous and impressive. It is curious to compare these differences of opinion with the controversy that raged, during the life of Tasso, between his partisans and those of Ariosto. Strange that one so proud and confident as Tasso was; so successful, too, in answering his first assailants; should have succumbed, at last, to the Della Cruscan

academy, and actually recast his work, and corrected his phraseology, in deference, as it would appear, to their authority! But, persecuted by critics and by princes, Tasso has had one glory, of which they could not bereave him. He has been the people's bard. His strains have hardly yet ceased to swell the alternate songs of Italian gondoliers.

Both Ariosto and Tasso wrote many things besides their great works. The dramatic pieces of the former will be mentioned when in sketching the last period of modern literature we come to speak of the Italian theatre. But, though in that period alone the loftier kinds of the Italian drama deserve notice, we may here allude to the *Aminta* of Tasso, as belonging rather to pastoral than dramatic song. Pastoral poetry had received a new shape of mingled verse and prose from Boccacio, in which he had tried to mingle, likewise, the tone of the Virgilian eclogue with that of the romantic muse. Composed on the same plan, but with far superior elegance, the *Arcadia* of Sannazaro* enjoyed at one time a degree of popularity that carried it through more than sixty editions. It was Beccari† of Ferrara, however, who, remembering perhaps the latter form of the Greek satiric plays (for the *Orfeo* of Politien is too tragical to have been his model) brought out the first regular bucolic drama at the court of Hercules II. His dreary sentimentalism, made only worse by a seasoning of coarse gayety, was soon forgotten in the graces of Tasso's *Aminta*. Faults were entailed upon this delicious poem by the system to which it belongs; but they are redeemed by infinite beauties in

* A. D. 1458—1530.

† A. D. 1510—1590.

the execution, and by the balmy atmosphere of love that exhales from every line. Not that quaint conceits, in the Petrarchan style, are altogether banished from the *Aminta*, any more than they are from the *Jerusalem*. By a like incongruity a chill is too often thrown even over the more animated scenes of Guarini's* *Pastor Fido* : and, as effects are easily copied, the affectation which taints these otherwise exquisite productions, became not the exception but the rule with a crowd of bucolic dramatists, male and female, who were roused to activity by their success ; and whose writings, at the termination of the good age, already announced the fall of Italian poetry in that which ensued. To aid in precipitating that fall the services of the sonneteers were not wanting. To little purpose did the fiery Chiabrera,† in the most original of his numerous effusions, restore the lineaments of the classic ode, and clothe them sometimes with Anacreontic vivacity, sometimes with the serious energies of Pindar. This was but a transient gleam, mocking the intellectual ruins of the seventeenth century. For, coeval with Chiabrera was MARINO,‡ the arch corrupter of Italian taste. What need is there to enumerate and analyse his many kinds of composition ? In all, made wanton by the very talents he undoubtedly possessed, and stung by a lust of novelty that has frequently proved mischievous to literature, he strove to outshine his mighty predecessors by substituting bombast for dignity, effeminacy for tenderness, the play of words for genuine fancy. To the disgrace of Italy, nay of Europe, Marino had everywhere his imitators, and some who,

A. D. 1537—1612. † A. D. 1552—1637. ‡ A. D. 1569—1625.

like himself, were for a season so famous, that in more than one country it required a vigorous exertion of recovered mental power to trample their reputation in the dust. In Italy they were adored and copied through the entire era of the proverbially degenerate *seicentisti*. Only towards the termination of that era are some sparks of true feeling, of patriotic sentiment, again perceptible in the verses of the Florentine Filicaia.* Yet, amid the general degradation of the seventeenth century, it would be unfair not to distinguish the burlesque epic of Tassoni;† a good specimen of that national species of satire which Berni‡ had made classical about a hundred years before him.

Whether it were because most of the prose writers, being also poets, wavered between two manners; or because a painful imitation of the ancients, in many instances, hampered them; or because there were in the example of Boccacio, the great father of Italian prose, certain provocatives to a faulty exuberance of style, which the opposite example of Macchiavelli could not correct; there is no doubt that, with these illustrious exceptions, the authors of this class in Italy fall short of her highest poets. After the days of Boccacio and Sacchetti, history became the field of their triumphs. But he who indisputably excelled the rest in historical composition did not confine himself to that province. The too famous *Prince* of MACCHIAVELLI,§ and his *Reflections on the First Decade of Livy*, are as well known as his *Florentine Annals*; and, in the estimation of some, the *Reflec-*

* A. D. 1642—1707.

† A. D. 1565—1635.

‡ A. D. 1490—1536.

§ A. D. 1469—1527.

tions far surpass his other works. We leave the political system of this extraordinary individual to the loud reprobation and the ingenious apologies which it has alternately provoked; admitting, however, all the weight of the general sentiment that has identified his name with principles of guile and cruelty. No one will disparage his penetrating sagacity, his profound knowledge of antiquity; nor regret anything in his clear and nervous style, except too great a monotony in the structure of his periods. GUICCIARDINI* has more variety and harmony in this respect: yet he does not approach Macchiavelli in force and depth of thought, or true manliness of expression. The History of the Council of Trent, written with much bold simplicity by Sarpi,† and that of the French civil wars by the acute and entertaining DAVILA,‡ illustrate Italian prose at an epoch fatal to poetry: but, on the other hand, the ambitious parade of Bentivoglio§ makes it manifest that no kind of composition was wholly exempt from the besetting sins of the seventeenth century.

From the literature of Italy to that of SPAIN is an easy transition. The progress of letters in the Spanish peninsula was materially influenced by Italian precedents at the most brilliant point of the period which we are now considering. Not but that the original genius of the Spaniards, and their proud consciousness of national greatness, had much to do with the maintenance and improvement of their literature, in the face of the Inquisition itself. Released by the conquest of Granada|| from the pre-

* A. D. 1482—1540. † A. D. 1552—1623. ‡ A. D. 1576—1631.

§ A. D. 1640. Author of a History of the Wars in the Netherlands.

|| A. D. 1492.

sence of internal foes, prosperous at home and powerful abroad, Spain naturally rose to high mental dignity ; and with all that she gathered from foreign contributions, her writers kept much of their native vein, more free than before of Orientalism, but still breathing of their own romantic clime. A close connection, however, for more than one hundred years, with Italy, familiarised the Spanish mind with the eminent authors of that country, and with the ancient classics which she had recalled from the tomb. It is said that the advice of a Venetian ambassador first drew the famous BOSCAN* to an acquaintance with the Italian taste. His friend GARCILASO DE LA VEGA† shared with him the task of refining Spanish poetry according to the standard he had set up. DIEGO DE MENDOZA‡ “the great historian, poet, soldier, and statesman,” as he is styled by the vigorous pen of Mr. Lockhart,§ took the same side ; and the opposition offered, the scornful reproaches showered upon them, by the disciples of the old Castilian school, were unable to defeat an enterprise thus begun and thus seconded. Let us bestow a few sentences on this triumvirate.

Boscan was a bold innovator. He availed himself, indeed, although born in Catalonia, of the Castilian dialect, which the union of Castile and Aragon had made the language of all Spain. But forsaking the national style of his earliest compositions, he introduced into the second book of his poems, consisting of those songs and sonnets, by which he became renowned, the Italian versification, in the whole com-

* A. D. 1500—1544.

† A. D. 1500—1536.

‡ A. D. 1500—1575.

§ Notes to Don Quixote, Vol. I. 363.

pass of its rhythm, rhyme, and metres. The Italian spirit he sought to imbibe by imitating Petrarch : and, in point of expression, the imitation is very successful ; yet the Spaniard has more heat and force, more of the struggle of passion against reason, than we find in the melodious reveries of the Tuscan poet.

The few but exquisite poems of Garcilaso were well entitled to appear in the same volume with those of Boscan. For he, likewise, emulated Petrarch ; and his sensibility, his delicacy, perhaps also his false wit, bring him nearer than his friendly rival to their common model. Garcilaso is even better known as having taught his countrymen the soft and melancholy notes of the pastoral reed. Here, too, he followed, or wished to follow, at once Virgil and Sannazaro ; and was himself followed, but not overtaken, by a host of Spanish bucolics.

Diego de Mendoza should rank above his brother triumvirs. The Spaniards, in assigning him the lowest place, regard only the inferior sweetness of his sonnets : but Mendoza carried into other branches of literature the forcible and various talents which empowered him to play so prominent a part in public life. Among other things, he polished and perfected the old Castilian *redondilla* : he composed, in old age and retirement, a history of the Moorish revolt,* whose consummate elegance hardly atoned, in the eyes of the Spanish court, for the boldness of its details : and, better than all, while yet a student at Salamanca, he founded by his comic romance, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, a species of fiction that has been

* A. D. 1568.

subsequently enriched by some of the first writers of Europe. In classical literature, Lucian and Petronius may be said just to graze the edge of this domain ; but neither of them exhibits such an intimate knowledge of man, and of a peculiar people, as is here revealed by a Spanish youth before emerging from the precincts of an university. This extraordinary precocity of Mendoza was an omen of the future statesman: we fear we must add, in his case, of the future knave.

The Spaniards dwell with complacency upon other literary names, pertaining to the same period with the three which have now been singled out. They boast of their *divine* lyric, for so they term him, Ferdinand de Herrera ;* of the harmonious, religious, and withal Horatian Ponce de Leon ;† of Miranda's ‡ Castilian eclogues ; of Montemayor's § pastoral romance, a work as much admired and copied, at its first appearance, as the *Amadis* had been before, of Ercilla's || *Araucana*, an epic whose merits were wildly exaggerated by Voltaire. But an European reputation, a place in the memories and hearts of many different races, was reserved for a genius of loftier grade than these. The year 1549 was made memorable, in Spanish story, by the birth of CERVANTES.

Few readers need to be told that the author of *Don Quixote* wrote many other books, in a variety of styles, and with various degrees of success. But with that great production it would be as absurd to compare the other fruits of the same pen, as it would be to comment at large upon a work familiar to every

* A. D. 1500—1578. † A. D. 1527—1591. ‡ A. D. 1494—1598.

§ A. D. 1520—1561.

|| A. D. 1533—1583.

school-boy. We believe, moreover, that the real aim and merits of Don Quixote are very generally appreciated. If it be read once for the mere adventures, so delightfully combining the romantic with the humorous, further perusals, (and who is content with only one?) seldom fail to beget veneration for that genius, which could unite with the finest and most exterminating satire upon books of chivalry a manly and loyal sense of all that is generous, sublime, and wise, in the character of the true cavalier; which could expand the rambles of a crazy gentleman and his attendant into a picture of Spain and its inhabitants, so comprehensive and minute as to leave us nothing to learn about her villages and castles, her cities and sierras, for the age in which the scene is laid; which, in depicting two persons, as strongly opposed as is the world of poetry to the world of prose, and yet, like other extremes, meeting on certain ground common to both—one erring from visionary enthusiasm and one from self-blinding calculation—could at the same time hold up a mirror of human nature, that will show to all men some of their own features. And Cervantes, likewise, with the highest creative power, has forced us to love his creations. With all his follies we love Quixote; with all his selfishness we love Sancho. Our sympathies descend, as no other history or fiction has made them do, to the horse of the master, to the ass of the squire. Rozinante and Dapple are cherished names with thousands who never heard of Alexander's Bucephalus, or of the Cid's Bavioca.

In 1599, six years before the first part of Don Quixote was published, Mattheo Aleman, by his *life of Guzman d' Alfarache*, kept up the Spanish pre-

dilection for novels of roguish adventure. A little later, among the manifold writings of Quevedo,* there are some whose gay wit and satire have induced a French critic to call him the Voltaire of Spain. In a more serious vein, the historical works of the elegant Mariana,† who was wise enough to render his original Latin into his vernacular tongue, and of the pure, energetic, faithful Antonio de Solis,‡ help to redeem the literary vices of the seventeenth century. But during that space of time, and especially from the middle to the end of it, the decay of letters kept pace with the fall of the Spanish power. The humiliation of both seemed completed in the reign of the second Charles.§ Unfortunately for the Spaniards, political animosity forbade them to learn anything from Britain or from France, at an epoch when either country could have taught things worthy of all acceptance. But with the Italians they maintained a close relation in the decline as well as in the improvement of their literature. Between these nations there was a reciprocal contagion. The Italian Marino had been infected by a Spanish education, and in return he gave lessons at least as bad as he received. GONGORA|| was his contemporary in Spain, and his rival in corrupting the taste of a whole people. From the ability of this writer, though great, from his wit, though rare and subtle, no results could flow except an aggravation of that tendency to florid pomp and affected refinement, which the Spaniards of themselves, and as a consequence of their old connection with the Moors, were sufficiently inclined to. Gon-

* A. D. 1580—1645.

† A. D. 1533—1623.

‡ A. D. 1616—1686.

§ A. D. 1665—1700.

|| A. D. 1561—1627.

gora became the leader of two sects that vied with each other in absurdities which it would be painful to examine. Extravagance was now the besetting sin in poetry ; childish fastidiousness in prose.

Nevertheless we may part from Spanish letters (since there will be little to say of them hereafter) upon higher ground. In Spain, as in other parts of Europe, a regular theatre grew out of religious shows and acted allegories. Then pastoral poetry was dramatised. Then romance was dramatised. Plays of incident and intrigue, without particular aim or good painting of character, were brought out by the elder Naharro :* their coarse and ragged outline was soon filled up with more humour and sententiousness by Lope de Rueda : a few strokes from the pen of Cervantes embellished the rude but ripening art. It was not, however, in dramatic poetry that the magic of his pen was destined to work its miracles. Passing over, therefore, both his lighter pieces, and the traits of Æschylean power and patriotism discernible in his *Numantia*, we hail in LOPE DE VEGA† the great father of the Spanish stage. The instinctive acuteness of that prolific genius divined the taste of his countrymen ; and he fed their appetite for complicated plots and extraordinary adventures with novels in a theatrical form. Such is the real nature of Lope's *comedies*, as all his dramas have been styled. Exactly as the substance of novels varies ; mournful or humorous, historic or ideal ; so varied this species of comedy. The one thing needful in it was a tangled intrigue to keep curiosity alive. After the time of Lope, sundry divisions and subdivisions of the art

* About A. D. 1510.

† A. D. 1562—1635.

were enumerated : *divine* and *human* comedies : comedies *of the cloak and sword* ; *lives of saints* and *sacramental acts*. Through the whole circle of these, and other varieties, as yet undistinguished by name, Lope de Vega ran with inexhaustible fertility and readiness. He wrote more than 2000 plays. He often composed an entire play in less than twenty-four hours. What wonder that his conceptions should be often rather wild than bold : that his style, though poetical, should be too frequently careless ; careless even in the profusion of its flowers, which he stayed not to cull or to arrange ! Not so daring in the first conception, but more regular in plan, more finished in execution, were the dramatic works of CALDERON.* If Lope originated the Spanish comedy, Calderon improved it. He drew character more vividly than Lope ; he unravelled intrigue more skilfully. And yet Calderon lost sight of nature in many of his portraits ; and despised simplicity in much of his expression. He is so addicted to strained conceits, to startling hyperboles, that it is difficult to understand the intense devotion of Schlegel to his memory. And then to exalt Calderon as the poet of Christianity ! The poet of Catholicism would have been a fitter title.

One word on PORTUGAL for the sake of Camoens. The dialect of that country was distinguished from the sister language of Castile by lighter and softer forms. It was early applied to the purposes of poetry ; and the national jealousy of the Portuguese was sufficient to make them contend with their neighbours in every other branch of letters. Some of

* A. D. 1601—1687.

those natives of Portugal, who shone in Spanish composition, such as Miranda and Montemayor, took care to write also in their own tongue. But it has been justly said that the Portuguese literature is complete without being rich. Although, in following all the changes that affected the intellectual condition of Spain, in yielding to the influence of the Italians, and to the influence of the classics, is still preserved an independent tone, yet in only two departments was remarkable excellence achieved. The bucolic muse was most at home on those banks of the Tagus which LOBO* celebrated; and the great Portuguese epic transcends all the similar productions of Spain. As Portugal had a golden period of maritime enterprise and glory,† so the very spirit of that period seems to be infused into the mind of CAMOENS,‡ and to sustain the long and towering flight of his *Lusiad*. That poem has some undeniable defects. Its subject, the discovery of India, is obviously rather historical than poetical: it is not so much a regular epic, as a gallery of pictures from the Portuguese annals, set in an epic frame: and the mixture of different mythologies, though not unknown in other works, is clumsy and revolting. But it is equally undeniable that the genius of Camoens has caught from the classic poets of antiquity their clearness of intuition, their inventive skill, their lively and elegant simplicity, without ever forgetting his own age or the land of his fathers. He deserves all this praise: and if not enough to exalt him to the side of Tasso, it is enough to place him not far below that radiant light of Italy. In their fortunes these illustrious contem-

* A. D. 1550.

† A. D. 1411—1578.]

‡ A. D. 1524—1579.

poraries were too much alike. Alfonso imprisoned Tasso: Sebastian let Camoens starve. We rejoice in the retributive ruin of Ferrara and of Portugal. As for the latter, her neglected bard was speedily revenged by Philip II., and the enormities of Spanish oppression. And, though the Portuguese at last shook off that iron yoke, among all the honours of the house of Braganza they have never been able to reckon a rival for Camoens.

From the "sole dominion," or at least the "surpassing glory" of this luminary in the western horizon, let us divert our eyes to another quarter, where the heavens are "sown with stars, thick as a field." Simply to record the names of the chief ENGLISH authors, between the beginning of the sixteenth century and the reign of Queen Anne, would require no little space. Many we must omit altogether: on the greatest we can do no more than touch, with a hasty though reverent hand.

Soon after the union of the Roses,* some rays of intellectual light began to glimmer again. But we must pass by Barklay,† and other obscure versifiers of the time of Henry VII. In the next reign we must not be delayed by the king's fitful displays and capricious patronage of talent; nor by Wolsey's magnificent zeal for true learning; nor even by the sonnets of the gallant and gentle SURREY,‡ who hoped to make his Geraldine as famous as Petrarch's Laura, and who certainly copied Petrarch, in his best mood, with brilliant success. Sonnets, however, have never built up a high reputation in British literature;

* A. D. 1485.

† Imitator of Brandt's *Ship of Fools*, a German satire. About A. D. 1500.

‡ Executed A. D. 1547.

though Shakspeare and Milton sometimes imprisoned their elastic thoughts in that durance, and later writers have been slow to discover that the masculine spirit of our poetry is equally averse to confining a rich conception, and to expanding a poor one, to the limits of fourteen lines. Wyat, likewise, the friend of Surrey, must be passed by; with a regret that is roused less by his sonnets, stuffed as they are with Italian conceits, than by the ease and point of his satirical epistles, so superior to the acrimonious grossness of the scurrilous ballad-monger Skelton.* Over the epoch of the bigoted Mary we will not linger. Yet genius languished not in those dreadful days. About the close of her reign there was planned and partly composed the famous *Mirrour for Magistrates*,† an allegorical poem on the unfortunate characters of English history, which, if it borrowed unreservedly from Virgil, Dante, and Boccacio, was at the same time instrumental in suggesting the rudiments of his manner, style, and metre, to the author of the *Fairy Queen*. But now burst upon us the AGE OF ELIZABETH;‡ if that glorious period must still take its designation from an able mistress of police—perhaps a great sovereign,—but certainly a heartless, tasteless woman, whose best public virtues were private vices; who prated of humanity, while she committed murder; and pretended to love letters, while she neglected their brightest ornaments. Call it rather the age of Spenser; the age of Hooker; the age of SHAKSPEARE, greatest of earthly names. It is true that Elizabeth encouraged learning: or

* Skelton published in 1512; died in 1529.

† A. D. 1557; published A. D. 1559.

‡ A. D. 1558—1603.

rather, though she herself understood and cherished only the triflings of pedantry, yet even this was productive of good in a country, where the reception of the ancient classics had been so slow and sullen that Erasmus * himself had failed, at the two Universities, to make an impression in their favour. Nor can it be denied that by upholding, from whatever motives, the Protestant religion, Elizabeth guarded a mainspring of free, excursive thought, whose impulse was keenly felt in literature. And, by authorizing that version of the Scriptures, which became, under her successor, the basis of our present English Bible, she both supplied, according to a philosophic historian,† “the richest store-house of the native beauties of our ancient tongue,” and, in the emphatic words of one, who always criticises well when he knows his subject,‡ “gave a *mind* to her people.” But the grand workings of that mind were from below ; not stimulated so much by royal or noble patronage, as by the innate and salient vigour of the middle classes. Their healthy appetite was now no longer to be satisfied by sonnets like Surrey’s; nor by buffooneries like Borde’s;§ nor by epigrams like Heywood’s, though his “merriments moved even the rigid muscles of Queen Mary;”|| nor by mere *inductions* like Sackville’s.¶ While on the one hand intellect was roused and information spread, and on the other hand enough of romance and superstition for the purposes of fancy still remained, to these there was superadded the mental aliment derived from translations of the classics, from the Italian literature,

* A. D. 1467—1536. † Mackintosh. ‡ Hazlitt. § A. D. 1542.

|| Warton’s History of English Poetry, III. 371.

¶ Induction to the *Mirroure for Magistrates*.

and that of other modern countries ; and all together broke into a flame in the poetry of SPENSER* and of SHAKSPEARE.†

Not to speak of the former as a pastoral poet, nor with reference to any work except the *Fairy Queen*, we cannot concede to a German critic ‡ that a comparison of this with the *Orlando Furioso*, which it resembles in many both of its faults and beauties, would be prejudicial to Spenser. Granting the Italian poem to be a labyrinth of perpetual vicissitude, is it fair to call the English one merely “a well laid-out garden of tiresome sameness?” This seems an inconsistent mode of characterising that which is admitted to be the fruit of “an inexhaustible fancy,” and which is, indeed, full of such variety as necessarily flows from great inventive and descriptive powers. As for the *style* of Spenser, his slightest effort appears ever sufficient to make it all alive with images and words “discolour’d diversely,”

“Like to an almond-tree y-mounted high
On top of green Selenis all alone,
With blossoms brave bedeck’d daintily ;
Her tender locks do tremble every one
At every little breath that under heav’n is blown.”

And the wide compass of his *music*, too, must be described in some of its own exquisite modulations ; for, in that music

“The silver-sounding instruments did meet
With the base murmur of the water’s fall ;
The water’s fall, with difference discreet,
Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call ;
The gentle warbling wind low answered to all.”

On Shakspeare what volumes have been written ;

* A. D. 1553—1598.

† A. D. 1564—1616.

‡ Eichhorn ; *Geschichte der Litteratur*, IV. 614.

what volumes could be written still! But would it not be absurd to expatiate here upon the distinctions between the classical and the romantic drama, when, after all, these lie so much in the externals and accidents of poetry, so little in its essence, that there is not one vital principle of Aristotle's which may not be illustrated out of Shakspeare? Would it not be absurd to debate the comparative excellence of Shakspeare in Tragedy and Comedy, when the recollection of Othello rushes on the mind in company with that of Falstaff; or when we reflect on the ever-mingling threads of mortal destiny, made up of contrasts, that are so faithfully interwoven in the tissue of his plays? Everything that a poet needs to know, he knew: everything that a dramatist should imitate, he imitated. Not set by his side, but shrined within his bosom, was that fabled dæmon, at the waving of whose wand houses were unroofed, breasts uncovered, remotest solitudes disclosed; so that, at one time, he could exhibit "all the world a stage, and all the men and women merely players;" at another time, he could bid "close pent-up guilts rive their concealing continents;" at another, could summon up before him "antres vast and desarts idle" to be made populous with the fantastic beings of his own imagination. Of Shakspeare, an universe in himself, it seems superfluous to add that he is to many minds the whole British theatre. In a sketch, at least, so cursory as this, we shall not attempt to chronicle its history on either side of that engrossing name. Who would bear with us in going back to the *miracles* and *moralities* of the elder times; to the elements of comedy in *Gammer Gurton's needle*, or of tragedy in Sackville's *Gorboduc*? Full of the image of

Shakspeare, who could descend to even the best of his successors : to the forcible Massinger ; or the pathetic Otway ; or the sparkling, rakish Farquhar ; or the brilliant Congreve ; or the elaborate Sheridan ; admirable painters as they all are, in their several styles, of the lights and shades of artificial life ? And, if it be true that, among contemporary dramatists, Shakspeare was not a single prodigy, but only the greatest of many wonders, yet are not Webster and Deckar, Marston and Marlow, Middleton and Rowley, acknowledged by their eulogists to have sunk into oblivion ? Nay, for a thousand who know Shakspeare, is there one well versed in the learned Jonson ; or the critical Beaumont ; or his other soul, the most flowery, most ambitious, most poetical Fletcher ?

Shakspeare and his contemporaries bring us just within the verge of the seventeenth century, so memorable in our annals for the long struggle against the arbitrary principles of the House of Stuart, which it witnessed, and for the final triumph of liberty over both the arms of her enemies, and the far more dangerous and disgusting crimes and follies of many who called themselves her friends. Throughout this period, notwithstanding numerous evils, which Providence alone could have over-ruled for ultimate good, the advancement of letters was not retarded. Upon the throne, the pedantry of James I. was countervailed by the elegant taste of his son ; and, even his dissolute grandson, with all his French predilections and itch for obscenity, showed himself able to appreciate those more manly attributes of British literature, which soon afterwards derived fresh vigour from the Revolution of 1688. In poetry, we boast

of Hall, Cowley, Waller, Milton, Butler, Dryden : in prose, besides some of these poets, who were masters, likewise, of the other branch of composition, we may distinguish Brown, Taylor, Barrow, Tillotson, and Temple.

Bishop HALL,* who claims, not quite justly, to be esteemed the earliest English satirist, imitates Juvenal, Persius, and occasionally Horace, with so much wit and energy as to verify those funereal lines, which say of him :

“ Whom Ashby bred and Granta nurs'd,
Whom Halstead and old Waltham first
To rouse the stupid world from sloth
Heard thund'ring with a golden mouth.”

COWLEY,† though led astray by an erroneous school, compensates for his quaint, perverse metaphysics, by dazzling gleams of a better nature that was sometimes more powerful than his system. WALLER,‡ the very father of smooth versification in our language, was lucky in that vein of song which calls upon its author for no depth of passion or soaring pitch of thought. In many particulars these poets are unlike, but in both we perceive a certain polish of courtesy and gallantry, which kept off the puritanical rust of their times. And MILTON,§ too, in all the nobler parts of his works, was at a measureless distance from the puritans. What has that hateful class of men, what have their dishonest advocates, to do with anything but the dross and rubbish of his soul? We will give up to them the sophistry and bitterness of his controversial pen, the most lumbering portions of his prose, and the flattest lucubrations of his muse,

* A. D. 1574—1656.

† A. D. 1605—1687.

‡ A. D. 1618—1667.

§ A. D. 1608—1674.

when she grows polemical. But what have they in common with him whose stately verse adorned the masks and revels of our prime nobility ; with that beautiful youth, who slept beneath Italian shades, not unvisited by dreams such as haunt a land of poesy and love ; with that nursling “of delightful studies” who, when he girt up his loins, in maturer age, for an effort which “aftertimes should not willingly let die,” it was to wrestle with the mighty champions of Greece and Rome, in the strength of a kindred inspiration ? How could the barbarous precisians of his day, or how can the canters of the present age, those who, reversing the benevolence of Christianity, would turn the racy wine of life into the stagnant waters of their own sour fanaticism, pretend to sympathise with Milton in his heathen lore and classic imagery, his luxuriance of amorous sentiment, his warm rich portraitures of beauty and of joy ? Yet these are the things by which he now lives, and for which he will continue to be most dearly prized :

“ Whatever hypocrites austerely talk
Of purity, and place, and innocence,
Defaming as impure what God declares
Pure, and commands to some, leaves free to all.”

When we think on some of these things ; on the *Lycidas* and the *Comus*, or the *Allegro* and the *Penseroso*, or Adam and Eve in Paradise, it is difficult to remember that intense loftiness is also characteristic of Milton ; that to hold long communion with him, in fitting mood, is a labour, though an elevating labour ; and that we ever and anon

“ Strain'd to the height
In that celestial colloquy sublime,
As with an object that excels the sense
Dazzled and spent, sink down and seek repair.”

Let us turn then, for relief, to *Hudibras* and BUTLER.* Here is an incarnation of the highest wit and the grotesque drollery. Here, in a particular sense, is the poet of the puritans; one who was never weary of persecuting their vices with satire so searching and so true, that it will apply to grim and solemn knavery at all times. But if the reader be tired at last (the author never seems to be so) of incessant epigrams, he may, about the same time, exchange the restless activity, the short quick thrusts of Butler, for “the long-resounding march and energy divine” of DRYDEN:† of Dryden, who, if like Butler, he is an adept in the poetry of wit, yet clothes his wit in robes more flowing and magnificent. But Dryden is much more than a witty poet; and laughs at the system-hatching rage of those who would shut him up in a new class, apart from the great imaginative writers. Let it be remembered that his ode on St. Cecilia is the finest lyric composition since Pindar: that his Satires are vividly descriptive as well as declamatory: and that his Tales must have done something besides perfecting the language of English verse, to acquire, as they have acquired, a general popularity.

In his plays Dryden sacrificed to the corrupt taste of too many among his contemporaries. But for this fault he almost atones by his nervous, nimble prose, which ushered in the perfection of that species of writing in the subsequent century. He was a fit associate for TILLOTSON‡ and TEMPLE§ in the work of reforming our prose-style; which so greatly needed reformation. Perhaps Dryden, in this respect, was

* A. D. 1612—1680.

† Died A. D. 1694.

‡ A. D. 1631—1701.

§ A. D. 1628—1698.

the most useful of the three : since he avoids both the frigidity that is coupled with the clearness of Tillotson ; and the diffuseness that mars the elegance of Temple. Of his predecessors, COWLEY did most to lighten and to polish prose : but though, before him, by the version of the Bible, a noble cornerstone had been laid, this part of literature was long inferior to poetry in its structure. How justly has the sagacious Coleridge said of the English prose-writers from the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth to the end of the reign of Charles II., that they are usually “rich in various knowledge, exuberant in conceptions and conceits ; contemplative, imaginative, often truly great and magnificent in style and diction, but, doubtless, too often big, stiff, and *hyperlatinistic*.” From this criticism neither BACON,* the proudest name that science ever shared with literature, nor the self-kindling, exhaustless TAYLOR,† nor the gorgeous MILTON, can be withdrawn. And of Sydney, Hooker, Brown, Burton, Barrow, notwithstanding their high and varied excellencies, the same judgment will hold good.

In SCOTLAND the quick progress of the Reformation, when it had once fairly begun, bears testimony to the then advanced state of her intellectual culture. Yet religious controversy, or the political divisions with which it was mixed up, produced more lamentable consequences there than in the neighbouring country. By these the prosperity of the Universities was checked, and the progress of letters delayed. Again, the junction of the English and Scottish crowns,‡ although the forerunner of immense advan-

* A. D. 1560—1626.

† A. D. 1613—1667.

‡ A. D. 1603.

tages to both kingdoms, at first only withdrew from Scottish literature the stimulus previously afforded by the presence of a court, the concourse of nobility, and the sense of perfect independence. Then came the conflict between rival forms of protestantism, in which both sides lost sight of Christianity, and the muses were scared away from a distracted people. The establishment of the Presbyterian discipline at last opened a path for the return of national peace and polite learning; but from the time of James IV. to that of Queen Anne the great literary names of Scotland are few. We must not, however, forget SIR DAVID LYNDSEY,* a terse rhymmer, sometimes a good poet, but one whose stinging satire and familiar boldness made it lucky for him that he enjoyed the protection of the throne: nor DRUMMOND OF HAWTHORNDEN,† “whose labours in verse and prose” according to his editor in 1659, “shall live and flourish in all ages, whiles there are men to read them, or art and judgment to approve them.” Yet, in neither style would this writer have eclipsed BUCHANAN,‡ had the latter not lavished his extraordinary talents upon Latin composition.

Of the first negative effects (for so they must be termed) of the reformed faith upon the IRISH mind, we have already spoken. Nevertheless, a taste for letters as well as science showed itself among the protestants of Ireland previously to the close of the seventeenth century. The name of USHER§ is sufficient to recall a season of high distinction in biblical and antiquarian researches, and of great promise as to the future progress of his countrymen.

* A. D. 1490—1557.

‡ A. D. 1506—1582.

† A. D. 1585—1649.

§ A. D. 1380—1656.

The second period of FRENCH literature opens with the reign of Francis I.* The ancient classics had then become known : printing had been introduced : the middle class, and the useful arts which it is prone to cultivate, had risen to a degree of eminence that was partly due to the policy of Louis XI. To eradicate the barbarism that still lingered in colleges and elsewhere, and to propagate classical learning, were darling aims with the magnificent Francis. After him, Henry IV.,† who strove, with Sully's assistance, to soothe by every potent anodyne the rankling sores of religious hatred, was the next benefactor to letters. Then were the treasures of the East, in addition to those of Greece and Rome, made familiar to French students ; and the modern achievements of other European countries incited and directed their literary ardour. In the succeeding reign, Cardinal Richelieu, of whom it is enough to say that he was the real sovereign of France, courted relief from state-intrigues, or from the weight of the iron sceptre which he wielded, in the prosecution of his early studies and intercourse with men of genius. After a certain period, devoted to Latin and theology, the improvement of the French tongue and poetry became his final and favourite object. For once even the institution of an Academy,‡ on the Della Cruscan plan, was serviceable to so good an end. The French Academy, while it humoured its founder by persecuting Corneille, did at the same time rally the first wits of the day around the standard of taste, and thus ushered in that brilliant era of Louis XIV.,§

* A. D. 1515—1547.

† A. D. 1635.

† A. D. 1589—1610.

§ Reigns A. D. 1643—1715.

when the glory of great ministers, great generals, and a great master of the art of government, was surpassed by that of the greatest writers to whom France has given birth.

The best evidence of the manner in which the studies patronised by Francis operated, and of the follies with which they had to struggle, may be gathered from the pages of RABELAIS.* Little do they know of this consummate genius, who dwell only on his riotous mirth; though none ever loved better than he a joke for the joke's sake, or hunted it down, when started, with more persevering and obstreperous hilarity. Still less do they know of him, who think of his obscenity or absurdity alone, and cannot understand that much of his coarsest filth, and much of his wildest nonsense, are but the cover of bold truths, too dangerous to dispense with such protection. If, like Shakspeare's Edgar, he played the bedlamite, like him it was for a noble cause. They should think also, of his vast erudition, of his shrewd satire, of the hard blows he dealt the papacy. Not without a high design was it ordained that Rabelais should be born in the same year with Martin Luther. Observe, too, how eloquent he is, even with so rude an instrument as the French prose of his time afforded. To raise that prose to elegance, without robbing it of simplicity, was a task reserved for AMYOT,† the translator of Plutarch. Then MONTAIGNE,‡ by dexterous management, compelled it to express, without formality, the pith of his philosophy. The bombast and affectation of some succeeding writers testify, however, that more of their

* A. D. 1483—1553.

† Died A. D. 1593.

‡ A. D. 1533—1592.

success was due to the happy talent of these two individuals than to the existing state of the language. But after Richelieu's academy had promulgated its laws, their goodness was exemplified in the purity of PASCAL'S* style ; and in the refined precision, and the moving rhetoric, that flourished together under Louis XIV. What names, among many others, are those of ROCHEFOUCAULT and SEVIGNE, of BOURDALOUE and BOSSUET ! What anatomical demonstrations of the human heart ! What mirror-like reflections of courts and of the world ! Then, too, was the sententiousness of LA BRUYERE ; the ingenuity of BAYLE ; the amenity of MALEBRANCHE ; the graciousness of FENELON !

Who doubts that the poetry of the French, in its fullest bloom, is prodigiously inferior to their prose ? Hear Eichhorn upon the characteristics of the former : “ French poetry is nothing but agreeable discourse, set off with some becoming finery : and the aim of the French poet is no other than by a nice choice of thoughts and images, by the delicacy of his turns, by a strict observance of propriety in expression, by correct and harmonious versification, to instruct and entertain. He thinks it no part of his duty to make deep, sincere feelings speak for themselves : enough for him to describe them ! He troubles himself not to exalt the interesting, through the free flight of fancy, to the ideal : enough for him to represent it elegantly ! A light, superficial stirring of the senses ; an airy play of wit ; such is French poetry ! ” Now this is a true criticism with reference to almost the whole body of French poetry from the date of the

* Died A. D. 1662.

old trouvères to the eighteenth century : and why, therefore, encroach on the limited remainder of our essay by minutely tracing its route between these points ? The jovial, comical MAROT,* coeval with Rabelais, began the first stage : but the sportiveness which Marot had caught from the Italians, appeared to RONSARD† to require a copious effusion of the antique to give it force and dignity. Hence the pedantry, the excess of Greek and Latin words, the pseudo-classical style, which Ronsard introduced into his abortive epic, and into the works of his six followers, whom with their master the fleeting homage of their own generation hailed as a Pleiad of poets. JODELLE,‡ one of the number, had, however, the merit of bringing copies of the Greek and Roman drama into the French theatre. But it was MAL-HERBE§ that first triumphed over the pomp and pedantry of Ronsard's sect ; and, though his odes are no more like lyric poetry than those of other Frenchmen, his style served as an useful pattern till the age of Louis. Then rises, with superior brilliancy, an authentic Pleiad :

Quæ septem dici, Sex tamen esse solent !

CORNEILLE the elder, MOLIERE, LA FONTAINE, RACINE, CORNEILLE the younger, BOILEAU. No one will hesitate as to the respective qualities to be coupled with each name : tragic greatness, sometimes too stiff or too pointed in expression ; comic power, always most successful when adapting to modern usages the scenes of Aristophanes or Plautus ; a grace, a matchless skill in narrative, so felicitous as to look

* A. D. 1495—1544.

† A. D. 1532—1573.

‡ A. D. 1524—1585.

§ A. D. 1556—1628.

like instinct; perfect elegance and tenderness; a taste for the romantic and surprising; neat satire conjoined with the love of order and as much knowledge of poetry as one who preferred art to nature could have. The French themselves are most enamoured of their tragedy, and suppose it to be formed on the Greek model. But, after all that the elder Corneille has achieved in *the Cid*, or Racine in his *Athalie*, French tragedy resembles that of the Greeks no more than a *petit maître* does Ajax or Prometheus.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought forth few great additions to GERMAN literature. The name of LUTHER * is in every sense the first of that period. To strike with the sword of the Word was his high vocation; and therefore he created a national form of speech, to which all dialects have been forced to bow, and a prose style, free from the faults and inconsistencies that had clung to the pens of even Tauler and Albert Durer. Luther found room for poetry also among his original writings; but his capital work was a translation of the Bible, in which he exhibited almost every kind of literary talent, and gave to scriptural expression a wide and wholesome sway over the German language. Passing over Fischart,† the German Rabelais, and Jacob Boehme,‡ the poetical mystic, observe next the adverse parties of OPITZ, of LOHENSTEIN, and of NEUKIRCH, with the proofs they yield that a fierce battle must often be fought, and aberrations to the right hand and the left must occur, before true principles secure the victory. The Silesian Opitz,§ a disciple of the

* A. D. 1483—1560.

† A. D. 1575—1624.

‡ A. D. 1511—1587.

§ A. D. 1597—1639.

ancients, a master of style and prosody, revealing, in many different species of song, the soul of a heroic poet, held on his way amid the troubles of the thirty years' war, and seemed destined to herald a band of followers happier and greater than himself. But German literature was ever too apt to take its hue from contingent influences. Thus Lohenstein,* being himself tainted with the vices of Marino's Italian poetry, had no difficulty in rallying a party to foster affectation and the mock sublime. Their innovations on the vernacular vocabulary were resisted by the strenuous Zesen,† and sundry quaintly-named societies: but the artificial vein of composition was most actively opposed by Neukirch,‡ and some others who ran into the contrary extreme of utter flatness and insipidity. These intended, with whatever bad success, to imitate the French style; a standard that had naturally obtained a temporary ascendant in Germany after the peace of Westphalia in 1648, and that of Nimeguen in 1678. What further consequences the adoption of that standard gave rise to, and how far they were at last counteracted, will presently be noticed.

III. We must now explain how it was that near the beginning of the eighteenth century, from causes that partly preceded it, and partly gained additional force during its progress, a visible change came over the spirit of literature.

The political state of Europe about the year 1700 could not fail to affect, in an eminent degree, the character of her mental productions. Britain, Germany, and Holland stood forth as the foremost as-

* A. D. 1638—1683.

† A. D. 1619—1689,

‡ A. D. 1665—1729.

sertors of liberty, and antagonists of arbitrary power. France, making violent efforts to aggrandize herself, and to blazon despotic principles, was nevertheless sowing in her own bosom the seeds of future revolution. The men were coming into existence who were fated to teach her a new theory: the circumstances were already operating that prepared her people for their lessons. She, too, at last, was to be ranged on the side of freedom. Happy for her, and for the world, had she never over-stepped it in her march!

The physical sciences were cultivated with astonishing success; without prejudice to that classical learning, of which NEWTON* would have blushed to be deemed neglectful. In classical learning itself a higher criticism was practised; applied first by BENTLEY,† whose very errors were more fruitful of good than truths in the hands of other men, and carried on by his successors in various parts of Europe. By the vast strides of improvement in these two departments, education was necessarily benefited; and accuracy and polish began to be required in literary works to an extent unknown at former periods. The use of modern tongues in the treatment of scientific subjects especially contributed to increase the clearness and precision of prose composition.

The empirical philosophy of LOCKE,‡ though it led too directly to scepticism, and other diseases of the intellect, and was too feebly opposed by the palliative theories of LEIBNITZ,§ served at least to display and to methodize the vigour of the human

* A. D. 1642—1727.

‡ A. D. 1632—1704.

† A. D. 1661—1742.

§ A. D. 1646—1716.

understanding. Eagerly embraced by the French, in their writings its most pernicious tendencies were manifested. They clothed this philosophy in every conceivable garb of prose and poetry, epistolary correspondence and romance, narrative and declamation. And thus their literature, being filled with a system that flattered the pride and passions of mankind, and recommended by the most winning liveliness and perspicuity of style, usurped an empire wider than their arms had been able to subdue. The revocation of the edict of Nantes* drove Bayle and other able men out of France in different directions: and everywhere they acquired a sway that was not successfully combated by those healthful influences, which have always emanated from the highest order of British genius, until her naval triumphs in the seven years' war† had raised Great Britain to a station of paramount weight with the continental powers.

The fruits of these causes, good and evil, will be seen as we summon before us, for a last review, the principal European nations.

No longer did the sun of ITALY flame in the meridian. Even, however, in the eighteenth century, that country boasts of some writers fit to sustain the singular glory she has gained by being alone equally eminent in ancient and modern literature. The lyrics and blank verse of FRUGONI‡ are admired on the south of the Alps: the operas of METASTASIO§ enjoy universal celebrity. Nothing less would have been adequate to the merits of one, who has uttered the soul of music, in feeling and imagery, by the very

* A. D. 1685.

‡ A. D. 1692–1768.

† A. D. 1756–1763.

§ A. D. 1698–1782.

breath of music, in versification and expression. Here, moreover, Italian genius is thoroughly original. The operatic poetry, as its laws were fixed by Metastasio, is exclusively Italian. It resembles neither foreign nature, nor nature in the abstract. Under all diversities of costume, it is still one musical voluptuous dream; occupied with neither place, character, nor circumstance, but solely with itself. In other things, the later taste of the Italians has been as dependent as their political condition. First, they endeavoured to supply the defects in their literature complained of by French critics, by building up a regular drama on French interpretations of Aristotle. Corneille, Racine, and Moliere were assumed as infallible guides, in tragedy and comedy, by MARTELLI* and his friends. Thus the dramatic art of Italy, which in Politien's hands, and afterwards in Tasso's, had leaned to the style of Virgil's eclogues; which, in those of Ariosto, had copied Plautus and Terence; which had shone, in the best age, with few gleams of native talent; again copied a pattern, and was not happy in selecting one. The fetters of the French taste were at last loosened by GOLDONI.† For, while he drove out of fashion the *comedies of art*, or extemporaneous pieces, which had long been a popular amusement, he yet, instead of aiming at Parisian correctness in composition, rather sought to take up the national humour and careless fluency of the theatrical *improvisatori*, to whose reign he put an end. GOZZI,‡ on the contrary, who, meaning to use dramatised fairy tales as the medium of satire on Goldoni, was so excited by the success of the chosen

* Died A. D. 1727.

† A. D. 1707—1792.

‡ A. D. 1763.

vehicle, that he applied himself seriously to adorn it, wrote more in the German than the Italian vein, according to the just remark of Sismondi. On the merits of ALFIERI,* the same critic shall pronounce: "He has combined the constructive skill, unity, pureness of design, and verisimilitude, proper to the French theatre, with the sublimity of situations and of characters, and the importance of events, of the Greek theatre, and with the depth of thought and sentiment of the English theatre." Has he not, likewise, almost burlesqued the antique, by an exaggerated imitation of its peculiarities? And, as far as a rage for imitation is concerned, he is not singular among his contemporaries. Some follow the English school; some follow the old writers of Italy itself. "The word *imitate*," says a lively author, "seems to have been invented for this country." Hence even the abilities of Sir John Hobhouse† have not brought into general vogue the respectable names of Cesarotti, Parini, Pindemonte, Monti, Foscolo. Lord Byron, it will be observed, left that task to his illustrator.

In SPAIN, under the government of the Bourbons, and partly through the patronage of Philip V.,‡ there was a certain revival of literature. But unfortunately parties divided; and the educated Spaniards were so much attracted by French glitter, as to turn with disgust from their own literary worthies. The code of this party may be best learned from *the poetics* of DE LUZAN;§ one of the many who have read Aristotle by the help of Parisian spectacles. Meanwhile the people remained steadfast to what

* A. D. 1749—1803.

‡ A. D. 1760—1746.

† Illustrations of Childe Harold, &c.

§ A. D. 1737.

they supposed to be the national standard, and long applauded, on the stage, the copiers, or rather caricaturists of Calderon. And, after the middle of the eighteenth century was past, a few remarkable men came back to the true Spanish taste, as far as the change of Spanish manners had left it unaltered. DE L'ISLA * wrote a comic romance, on the plan of Cervantes, to ridicule the monkish preachers. LA HUERTA† tried to emulate the old drama of Spain, with due deference to more recent principles, wherever he thought them reasonable. YRIARTE,‡ the first good fabulist of his country, exhibits the mingled graces of the ancient Castilian redondillas and of La Fontaine. VALDES,§ a lyric poet, whom Bouterwek || deems worthy of the best times of Spanish literature, has imbibed no small portion of the English spirit. Should that tendency become general among intellectual Spaniards, it would offer the fairest chance of the complete retrieval of their literary greatness.

At the death of Louis XIV. the powers of the FRENCH tongue had been unfolded to their full extent; immense progress had been made by Frenchmen in most branches of learning; light had begun to radiate from the capital throughout the provinces; and academies and periodical journals were diffusing education and a passion for reading over the whole land. An universal command of language, displayed most strikingly in the abundance of memoirs which have been composed by persons of all conditions, with nearly equal facility and elegance, thus became

* A. D. 1758.

† A. D. 1778.

‡ A. D. 1782.

§ A. D. 1785.

|| Geschichte der Poesie und Beredsamkeit.

characteristic of the natives of France, and contributed to the establishment of their literary despotism. Yet, even while that despotism prevailed abroad, France was subject to changes at home. Between 1715 and the present day she has known three eras in her literature: an era of imitation of models exclusively French; an era of aspirations after nature; and a revolutionary era. During the first, the usual course of imitators was pursued—a futile effort to outdo their masters in vigour or in refinement. Hence the exaggerated manner of the tragic CREBILLON,* and the antithetic point of FONTENELLE.† Nature, true wit, and the charms of style reappeared, when LE SAGE‡ gave his delightful fictions to the world: and, somewhat later, the highest enchantments of French prose were once more showered from the pens of VOLTAIRE,§ BUFFON, and ROUSSEAU. The taste of Voltaire was just and manly; his wit ever sparkling; his fecundity prodigious. History and romance; criticism and metaphysics; tragedy and comedy; epic poetry and lyric poetry; nothing came amiss to this versatile genius: and, though his poetry is much below his prose, he did not study in vain those great poets of England whom, with his usual dishonesty, he affected to cry down. The author of *Zaire* and of *Alzire* cannot be said to have read Shakspeare to no purpose. Buffon loved nature too well, he had drawn from her too deep draughts of beauty and sublimity, not to vie with her in the profuse magnificence and fire of his descriptions: and the name of Jean Jacques Rousseau sounds like

* A. D. 1674—1762.

† A. D. 1657—1757. †

‡ A. D. 1677—1747.

§ Voltaire, A. D. 1695—1778; Buffon, 1707—1780: Rousseau, 1712—1778.

another term for the mingled eloquence of sentiment and passion. How loftily do these writers soar above French dogmatism in the theory of the fine arts, even as it existed in their day, and was partly countenanced by Voltaire himself! But how deadly, in everything except style, were the antichristian sophistries of the first, the sceptical opinions of the second, and the self-willed reveries of the third! In co-operation with the degrading materialism of HELVETIUS,* their tendency was to blot God's word out of the memory of man, and God's image out of his soul. Then came the devilish enginery of the ENCYCLOPEDIA, conducted by DIDEROT† and D'ALEMBERT, whose principle was atheism. The people, with whom a work like this could find acceptance, was already ripe for the great Revolution;‡ an event still too fruitful of ominous forebodings, as well as recollections, to be touched on here, were it not for the congenial character which it has impressed upon the workings of the French mind. Its commencement was accompanied by some bursts of grandeur, such as broke from the lips of MIRABEAU.§ But soon was everything noble and refined borne down by a rage for destruction, which, at the moment when these lines are being traced, seems again to infuriate the base, the gross, and the ignorant in the community around us. And from that anarchy of all the social elements, which the Revolution brought on France, what literary monsters have emerged! If much of the rankness of that period clings even to the rhetoric of DE STAEL and the fancy of CHATEAUBRIAND,

* A. D. 1715—1771. † Diderot died A. D. 1784; D'Alembert, A. D. 1783.

‡ A. D. 1789.

§ Died A. D. 1791.

what shall we say to the hideous spawn of such a brain as VICTOR HUGO's, or to the systematic profligacy of such a dramatist as DUMAS? Some of this class, in their plays and romances, dream that they are treading in the footsteps of Shakspeare and Walter Scott. They had better resort, as Schlegel counsels, to models which they would have some chance of comprehending; namely, the old spirit and poetry of their own nation. The French historians of the present day have done this; and no one will deny that THIERRY, THIERS, and a few others, have done it with eminent success.

We must take up the GERMANS where we left them, under the encroaching influence of their French neighbours. By them they were inoculated with that poison of infidel prejudices which, notwithstanding the opposition of some great minds, has since circulated together with the life-blood of German philosophy and literature. The effects of scepticism in Germany have differed from those observable in France, only because it did not encounter, in the former country, either the tiger-element or the monkey-element, so conspicuous in the French character. But they have been sufficiently apparent in criticism, in metaphysics, and in all things liable to be worked upon by those modes of intellectual exertion. Under a wiser limitation of this sceptical tendency, German criticism might have been the parent of unmingled good; especially by the learning and genius it has brought to bear on classical subjects; greatly improving, we must confess, on the English critics of the last generation, and acting very favourably on those of the present, who, like Mitchell, Milman, Nelson Coleridge, and other ripe and eloquent

scholars, have made such subjects popular. Under the same limitation, it would not have been so often necessary to say of the German metaphysicians, that in straining after new ideas they have lighted only on new words ; a fault which in their English worshippers degenerates into the most nauseous coxcombry : or that they have been lured, by specious phantoms, far away from the regions of faith and truth, into abysses of error,

“ Where in the lowest deep, a lower deep,
Still threatening to devour them, opens wide.”

In France, literature takes much of its complexion from polite society ; in England, from active life and politics ; in Germany, where there is no political life, from mere speculation. Whatever the Germans borrow from other races, they are sure, in the end, to dye with the hues of their own philosophy. For example, the famous parties of GOTTSCHED* and BODMER,† who divided the literary world of Germany during the first portion of the eighteenth century, while the one inclined to French theories, and the other to classical principles, as interpreted by the British school, had enough of native industry, earnestness, and quaintness about them, to show the peculiar bent of the German mind, and to facilitate its further development.

Bodmer and his partisans had espoused critical tenets really most akin to the disposition of their countrymen. The erudite and thoughtful poet HALLER‡ sided with them : so did the pure, simple, virtuous GELLERT,§ penitently declaring, “ there was a

* A. D. 1700—1766.

† A. D. 1708—1777.

‡ A. D. 1698—1783.

§ A. D. 1715—1759.

time when I would have given anything to be praised by Gottsched ; and, half a year afterwards, I would have given anything to be excused his praise." But a greater than these, the greatest perhaps of all German poets, also allied himself with Bodmer. It was under his banner that KLOPSTOCK* appeared, when he gave vent, in song, to the ruling passions of his heart, the love of God, the love of his friends, and the love of his father-land. What could Frederick of Prussia, with all his French associates, and all the sneers they taught him to indulge in at German literature, expect to do against the sacred inspiration, the indignant patriotism, of such a writer as the bard of the *Messiah* ?

From Klopstock the Germans date the finest bloom of their poetry. The judgment, wit, and fire of LESSING† (for all these qualities meet in his divers works) caused many of its blossoms to expand. French taste, however, had a last chance of gaining the mastery, when mixed up with the manifold witcheries of WIELAND.‡ For her ultimate preservation from this danger, Germany is more indebted to the study of Shakspeare than to any other outward influence.

Yet Wieland must always be cited as one of the foremost German authors. In short, a whole galaxy of bright stars must be passed over, in order to give due prominence to him, to SCHILLER,§ and to GOETHE.||

Looking to his romantic poetry, Schlegel says of Wieland: "He might have become the German

* A. D. 1724—1803.

† A. D. 1729—1781.

‡ A. D. 1733—1813.

§ A. D. 1759—1805.

|| A. D. 1749—1833.

Ariosto, but stooped to be the imitator of such a prose writer as the novelist Crebillon." Looking more narrowly at his prose romances, we would add: He might have been a Greek of Athens, had he not been so much a Greek of Paris.

Schiller, as a dramatist, the only light in which to view him justly, had a more catholic spirit than either of the other two. In him we behold a mind ever strengthening as he advanced in life, and struggling on to greater heights of excellence. As a youth, he was wild and visionary: a Hercules, whose choice was not yet made. But the full-grown Schiller we would sometimes place at the feet of Shakspeare; sometimes at those of the Greek tragedians.

Goethe is a German of the Germans: a genius in whom heaven and gross earth, the high ideal and the low actual, succeed one another by the most abrupt transitions. How much must one know of Germany, and of its people, to understand the *Faust*! Without such knowledge, translations and expositions of that marvellous poem only bewilder the reader.

When the Germans talk of their prose as being yet imperfect, they seem to forget Goethe's *William Meister*. In point of style that book is faultless. Eichhorn,* indeed, from whom every labourer in literary history may derive assistance, affirms, on this head, merely that "the time is probably distant when German literature will be enriched by tasteful prose works of large compass:" and that "classic prose is more rare than classic verse in Germany."

* Geschichte, &c., IV., 1024.

For the strait bounds within which we must now compress all that it would be delightful to write on the latest period of BRITISH letters, there is a double consolation. In the first place, the legislative union of England and Scotland, in 1706, so amalgamated the two countries, that many of their chief differences in feeling and taste were at an end ; and though Ireland was not taken into the same close connection until 1801, the great stage whereon Irish literary talent has shown itself, during the last hundred and thirty years, has been on this side of the channel. In the second place, the few names we can afford to cite tell their own story. Accordingly it will not be necessary to array the English writers apart from the Scotch and Irish. Nor will it be necessary to describe at large those who may be mentioned. On the one hand, we need not make a comparative estimate of genius to suit the divisions of geography : Addison, Bolingbroke, Pope, Fielding, Cowper, Gibbon, Byron, of the south ; against Thomson, Hume, Smollett, Robertson, Burns, Mackenzie, Scott, of the north ; or against Steele, Swift, Parnell, Sterne, Goldsmith, Burke, Moore, of the west. On the other hand, every one knows what these men are most famous for. It is one of the greatest distinctions of modern literature, when contrasted with ancient, that some modern authors have shone both in prose and poetry. This is true of Swift, Addison, Pope, Johnson, Goldsmith, Byron, Scott, Southey, and many more. But who needs to be told that Pope and Byron are most eminent as poets ; that Addison, Swift, and Johnson are most happy in prose ; that Goldsmith, Scott, and Southey write in either style with so much ease and power as to hold

the judgment in suspense with regard to their main excellence. They always seem to have done best what we have last read from their pens.

Should any one urge, in opposition to some things said above, that even in the eighteenth century the authors of England, Scotland, and Ireland have strong national features, and ought therefore to be kept asunder ; we reply, that all their differences, proceeding from the superiority in classical scholarship of England, the metaphysical subtlety of Scotland, and the overflowing fancy of Ireland, are nothing to their points of likeness, proceeding from many powerful causes. Language has been one great assimilator. The authors of this period, with few exceptions, have written English ; varying, indeed, between the Saxon and other elements of the tongue ; and more or less idiomatic ; but for the most part pure, unprovincial English. The increase of knowledge has been another assimilator. Literary men have been forced to accumulate knowledge of all kinds, and to write up to the demands of a knowing public. The details of fiction are more scrupulously accurate, in our days, than those of history once were. Thirdly, political causes have aided in the work of assimilation. On the whole, the inhabitants of England, Scotland, and Ireland, have shared the constitutional advantages secured by the fathers of the Revolution. Happy and wise people, if they abide by the principles of those great men, and by the objects from which such principles derive their incalculable value ! Freedom of the press, the free profession of religious opinions, the free course of public justice, these are the main-springs of our social existence ; and the efficacy of these has been nearly equal in the three countries.

It has been altogether equal, as far as the state of letters is concerned.

The best way, then, of classing the authors of this last period is by generations. One generation ends with Goldsmith. The second ends with Cowper. The third consists of our own contemporaries.

Queen Anne died early in the first generation. But it may take its name, as it took its tone, from the assemblage of wits that were in maturity during her reign. These were true Britons, in diction as in everything else. They taught France a great deal: they learned from her little except a clear and concise structure of sentences in prose. In other matters they followed up what Dryden had begun.

What a thorough master of idiomatic prose was SWIFT!* Defoe† narrates as well as he: Cobbett, in the present day, has passages of finer eloquence than Swift could reach. But though both of these writers equal him in raciness of language, Swift surpasses them both in variety and learning. Even, however, from the strength of Swift, and the sprightliness of BOLINGBROKE,‡ we turn with pleasure to the sober elegance of ADDISON.§ His style is like green among the colours. We could rest on it for ever. It never dazzles: it never wearies.

Swift's poetry is his prose versified; unequal, therefore, in poetical merit, to the effusions of Gay, Young, Pope, Thomson, and Gray. Theirs is the poetry of art; but not on that account the less beautiful. We may laugh at the silly question whether POPE,|| the greatest of the series, were a poet. If you ask what

* A. D. 1667—1745.

† A. D. 1663—1731.

‡ A. D. 1672—1751.

§ A. D. 1672—1719.

|| A. D. 1688—1744.

he was as to invention, read the *Rape of the Lock* : what he was as to passion, read *Eloisa's letter*, and the *Elegy on an unfortunate lady*. Besides, he is as original as many other great poets. If his mind took in foundling-thoughts from all quarters, it dressed them up in a livery of its own.

Nevertheless, in creative genius, Pope and his brethren gave place to the novelists, Richardson, Fielding, Sterne, and Smollett. RICHARDSON * too often paints the impossible in character ; but he is unrivalled in the elaborateness of his representation. FIELDING'S † *Tom Jones* is the epic of romances. STERNE, ‡ though he could not equal Fielding in fluent wit, is a paragon of lucky quaintness ; and, in pathos, is approached by Mackenzie alone. Life is no longer picturesque enough to produce a match for SMOLLETT § in descriptive humour. GOLDSMITH, || too, who belongs by style to this first generation, would be immortal as a novelist, had he not so many more claims to immortality—a poet more simple and touching than Pope ever was ; a prose writer more vigorous than Addison ever could have been.

If the second generation were to be estimated by JOHNSON ¶ and GIBBON, ** it might justly be condemned for Latinized expression, and a pompous fashion of adorning common-places. But with their monotonous, though sounding rhetoric, we must contrast the spotless style of HUME ; †† and, somewhat later, the lively rhythm of Paley. ‡‡ ROBERTSON §§ is a fine writer ; who does not feel at home with his pen?

* A. D. 1689—1761

† A. D. 1707—1754.

‡ A. D. 1713—1768

§ A. D. 1720—1771.

|| A. D. 1731—1774.

¶ A. D. 1709—1784.

** A. D. 1737—1794.

†† A. D. 1711—1776.

‡‡ A. D. 1743—1805.

§§ A. D. 1721—1793.

The literature of modern oratory has no name so lofty as that of BURKE,* though from the want of wealth or high alliances he never led a faction, and from the mixed nature of a parliamentary audience he was not always an effective speaker. The largeness of his political views is of itself enough to preserve that name from degenerating into a party-toast: and the opulence of Burke's style is so vast, that it would hardly seem enhanced were we to make out his title to the letters of JUNIUS.

High finish in the execution of literary designs is a characteristic common to both the generations through which we have hurried. The low ebb of poetical genius, in the second, might be inferred from the temporary popularity of DARWIN.† COWPER‡ and BURNS§ supply the two exceptions to this inference. The fervid piety of the one, the fervid passions of the other, gave wings to their poetry. And, even after Dunbar and Allan Ramsay, Burns disclosed new powers in the Scottish dialect.

For any dearth of poetry in the preceding generation, full amends have been made by the present. If we marshal SCOTT, BYRON, MOORE, CRABBE, CAMPBELL, WORDSWORTH, SOUTHEY, COLERIDGE, MONTGOMERY, in the foremost rank, a multitude of not ignoble crests may be seen waving behind them. Some of those here mentioned are great poets without having written great poems. But this is not true of WALTER SCOTT. Granting that his novels may be included in the conception of his poetical character, he rises to the level of Homer,

“ And rivals all but Shakspeare's name below ! ”

* A. D. 1730—1797.

‡ A. D. 1731—1800.

† A. D. 1732—1802.

§ A. D. 1759—1796.

In prose composition British writers seem to be now gathering their breath, and proving their arms, for future efforts. Meanwhile they succeed best in biography and criticism. The first place, is due, perhaps, to those periodical works, which owe their form and much of their spirit to the great abilities of JEFFREY, GIFFORD, and WILSON.

Our prescribed limits are transgressed ere we have cast a glance at the literary productions of Holland, Denmark, Sweden, or the Slavonic countries. We cannot afford a single line even to the growing literature of NORTH AMERICA. Within the bosom of that vast continent there is no lack of talent sufficient to use, to noble purpose, the resources of a new and unexhausted scene. But before America can hope to produce literary works of the highest order, she must learn two lessons: to substitute real freedom of thought for democratic violence; and to honour genius and wisdom above riches.

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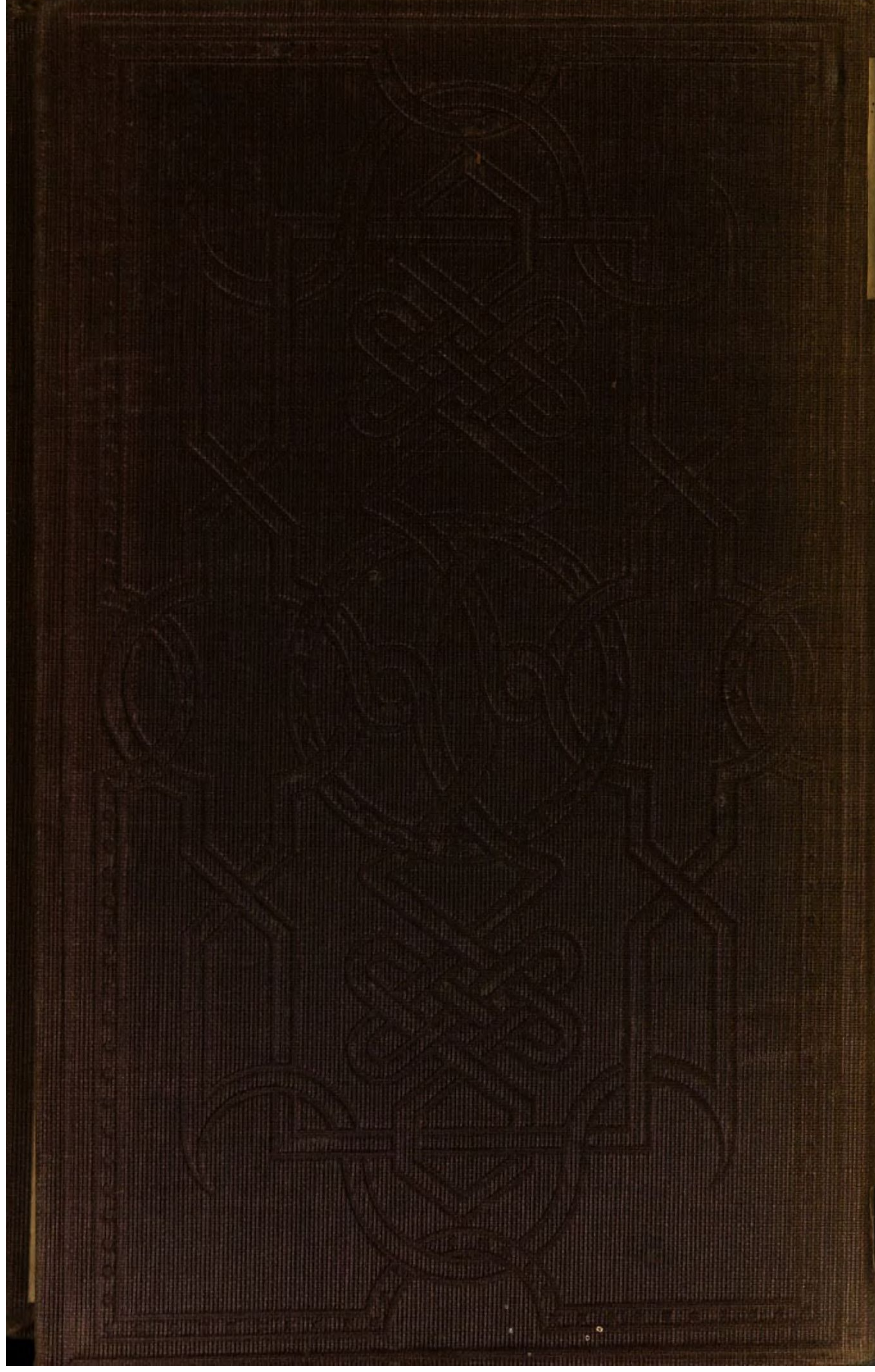
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